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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2282.

A PAIR OF BLUE EYES BY THOMAS HARDY
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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VOL. I.

"A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute;
No more."

A
PAIR OF BLUE EYES.

A NOVEL.

BY

THOMAS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD," ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

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THE PERSONS.

ELFRIDE SWANCOURT	<i>a young Lady.</i>
CHRISTOPHER SWANCOURT . . .	<i>a Clergyman.</i>
STEPHEN SMITH	<i>an Architect.</i>
HENRY KNIGHT	<i>a Reviewer and Essayist.</i>
CHARLOTTE TROYTON	<i>a rich Widow.</i>
GERTRUDE JETHWAY	<i>a poor Widow.</i>
SPENSER HUGO LUXELLIAN . .	<i>a Peer.</i>
LADY LUXELLIAN	<i>his Wife.</i>
MARY AND KATE	<i>two little Girls.</i>
WILLIAM WORM	<i>a dazed Factotum.</i>
JOHN SMITH	<i>a Master-mason.</i>
JANE SMITH	<i>his Wife.</i>
MARTIN CANNISTER	<i>a Sexton.</i>
UNITY	<i>a Maid-servant.</i>

Other servants, masons, labourers, grooms, nondescripts, etc., etc.

A PAIR OF BLUE EYES.

CHAPTER I.

A FAIR VESTAL, THRONED IN THE WEST.

ELFRIDE SWANCOURT was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface. Their nature more precisely, and as modified by the creeping hours of time, was known only to those who watched the circumstances of her history.

Personally, she was the combination of very interesting particulars, whose rarity, however, lay in the combination itself rather than in the individual elements combined. As a matter of fact, you did not see the form and substance of her features when conversing with her; and this charming power of preventing a material study of her lineaments by an interlocutor, originated not in the cloaking effect of a well-formed manner (for her manner was childish and scarcely formed), but in the attractive crudeness of the remarks themselves. She had lived all her life in retirement—the *monstrari digito* of idle men had not flattered her, and at the age of

nineteen or twenty she was no farther on in social consciousness than an urban young lady of fifteen.

One point in her, however, you did notice: that was her eyes. In them was seen a sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look farther: there she lived.

These eyes were blue; heavenly blue.

Her eyes were, more truly, blue as autumn distance—blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody slopes on a sunny September morning. A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked *into* rather than *at*. Of the two, indeed, perhaps this earthly blue is the more beautiful.

As to her presence, it was not powerful; it was weak. Some women can make their personality pervade the atmosphere of a whole banqueting hall; Elfride's was no more pervasive than that of a kitten.

Elfride had as her own the thoughtfulness which appears in the face of the Madonna della Sedia, without its rapture: the warmth and spirit of the type of woman's feature most common to the beauties—mortal and immortal—of Rubens, without their insistent fleshiness. The characteristic expression of the female faces of Correggio—that of the yearning human thoughts that lie too deep for tears—was hers sometimes, but seldom under ordinary conditions.

The point in Elfride Swancourt's life at which a deeper current may be said to have permanently set in, was one winter afternoon when she found

herself standing, in the character of hostess, face to face with a man she had never seen before—moreover, looking at him with a Miranda-like curiosity and interest that she had never yet bestowed on a mortal.

On this particular day her father, the vicar of a remote country parish, and a widower, was suffering from an attack of gout. After finishing her household supervisions, Elfride became restless, and several times left the room, ascended the staircase, and knocked at her father's bedroom-door.

"Come in!" was always answered in a hearty out-of-door voice from the inside.

"Papa," she said on one occasion to the fine, red-faced, handsome man of forty, who, puffing and fizzing like a bursting bottle, lay on the bed wrapped in a dressing-gown, and every now and then enunciating, in spite of himself, about one letter of some word or words that were almost oaths; "papa, will you not come downstairs this evening?" She spoke distinctly: he was rather deaf.

"Afraid not—eh-h-h!—very much afraid I shall not, Elfride. Piph-ph-ph! I can't bear even a handkerchief upon this deuced toe of mine, much less a stocking or slipper—piph-ph-ph! There 'tis again! No, I shan't get up till to-morrow."

"Then I hope this London man won't come; for I don't know what I should do, papa."

"Well, it would be awkward, certainly."

"I should hardly think he would come to-day."

"Why?"

"Because the wind blows so."

"Wind! What ideas you have, Elfride! Who ever heard of wind stopping a man from doing his business? The idea of this toe of mine coming on so suddenly! . . . If he should come, you must send him up to me, I suppose, and then give him some supper and put him to bed in some way. Dear me, what a nuisance all this is!"

"Must he have dinner?"

"Too heavy for a tired man at the end of a tedious journey."

"Tea, then?"

"Not substantial enough."

"High tea, then? There is cold fowl, rabbit-pie, some pasties, and things of that kind."

"Yes, high tea."

"Must I pour out his tea, papa?"

"Of course; you are the mistress of the house."

"What! sit there all the time with a stranger, just as if I knew him, and not anybody to introduce us?"

"Nonsense, child, about introducing; you know better than that. A practical professional man, tired and hungry, who has been travelling ever since daylight this morning, will hardly be inclined to talk and air courtesies to-night. He wants food and shelter, and you must see that he has it, simply because I am suddenly laid up and cannot. There is nothing so dreadful in that, I hope? You get all kinds of stuff into your head from reading so many of those novels."

"Oh no; there is nothing dreadful in it when it becomes plainly a case of necessity like this. But,

you see, you are always there when people come to dinner, even if we know them; and this is some strange London man of the world, who will think it odd, perhaps."

"Very well; let him."

"Is he Mr. Hewby's partner?"

"I should scarcely think so: he may be."

"How old is he, I wonder?"

"That I cannot tell. You will find the copy of my letter to Mr. Hewby, and his answer, upon the table in the study. You may read them, and then you'll know as much as I do about our visitor."

"I have read them."

"Well, what's the use of asking questions, then? They contain all I know. Ugh-h-h! . . . Od plague you, you young scamp! don't put anything there! I can't bear the weight of a fly."

"Oh, I am sorry, papa. I forgot; I thought you might be cold," she said, hastily removing the rug she had thrown upon the feet of the sufferer; and waiting till she saw that consciousness of her offence had passed from his face, she withdrew from the room, and retired again downstairs.

CHAPTER II.

'T WAS ON THE EVENING OF A WINTER'S DAY.

WHEN two or three additional hours had merged the same afternoon in evening, some moving outlines might have been observed against the sky on the summit of a wild lone hill in that district. They circumscribed two men, having at present the aspect of silhouettes, sitting in a dog-cart and pushing along in the teeth of the wind. Scarcely a solitary house or man had been visible along the whole dreary distance of open country they were traversing; and now that night had begun to fall, the faint twilight, which still gave an idea of the landscape to their observation, was enlivened by the quiet appearance of the planet Jupiter, momentarily gleaming in intenser brilliancy in front of them, and by Sirius shedding his rays in rivalry from his position over their shoulders. The only lights apparent on earth were some spots of dull red, glowing here and there upon the distant hills, which, as the driver of the vehicle gratuitously remarked to the hirer, were smouldering fires for the consumption of peat and gorse-roots, where the common was being broken up for agricultural purposes. The wind prevailed with but little abatement from its daytime boisterousness, three or four small clouds, delicate and pale, creeping along under the sky southward to the Channel.

Twelve of the fourteen miles intervening between the railway terminus and the end of their journey had been gone over, when they began to pass along the brink of a valley some miles in extent, wherein the wintry skeletons of a more luxuriant vegetation than had hitherto surrounded them proclaimed an increased richness of soil, which showed signs of far more careful enclosure and management than had any slopes they had yet passed. A little farther, and an opening in the elms stretching up from this fertile valley revealed a mansion.

"That's Endelstow House, Lord Luxellian's," said the driver.

"Endelstow House, Lord Luxellian's," repeated the other mechanically. He then turned himself sideways, and keenly scrutinised the almost invisible house with an interest which the indistinct picture itself seemed far from adequate to create. "Yes, that's Lord Luxellian's," he said yet again after a while, as he still looked in the same direction.

"What, be we going there?"

"No; Endelstow Vicarage, as I have told you."

"I thought you m't have altered your mind, sir, as ye have stared that way at nothing so long."

"Oh no; I am interested in the house, that's all."

"Most people be, as the saying is."

"Not in the sense that I am."

"Oh! . . . Well, his family is no better than my own, 'a b'lieve."

"How is that?"

"Hedgers and ditchers by rights. But once in

ancient times one of 'em, when he was at work, changed clothes with King Charles the Second, and saved the king's life. King Charles came up to him like a common man, and said off-hand, 'Man in the smock-frock, my name is Charles the Second, and that's the truth on't. Will ye lend me your clothes?' 'I don't mind if I do,' said Hedger Luxellian; and they changed there and then. 'Now, mind ye,' King Charles the Second said, like a common man, as he rode away, 'if ever I come to the crown, you come to court, knock at the door, and say out bold, "Is King Charles the Second at home?" Tell your name, and they shall let you in, and you shall be made a lord.' Now, that was very nice of Master Charley?"

"Very nice indeed."

"Well, as the saying is, the king came to the throne; and some years after that, away went Hedger Luxellian, knocked at the king's door, and asked if King Charles the Second was in. 'No, he isn't,' they said. 'Then, is Charles the Third?' said Hedger Luxellian. 'Yes,' said a young feller standing by like a common man, only he had a crown on, 'my name is Charles the Third.' And——"

"I really fancy that must be a mistake. I don't recollect anything in English history about Charles the Third," said the other in a tone of mild remonstrance.

"Oh, that's right enough, as the saying is; he was rather a queer-tempered man, if you remember."

"Very well; go on."

"And, by hook or by crook, Hedger Luxellian

was made a lord, and everything went on well till some time after, when he got into a most terrible row with King Charles the Fourth——”

“I can't stand Charles the Fourth. Upon my word, that's too much.”

“Why? There was a George the Fourth, wasn't there?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, Charleses be as common as Georges. However I'll say no more about it . . . Ah, well, as the saying is. 'Tis the funniest world ever I lived in—upon my life 'tis. Ah, that such should be!”

The dusk had thickened into darkness while they thus conversed, and the outline and surface of the mansion gradually disappeared. The windows, which had before been as black blots on a lighter expanse of wall, became illuminated, and were transfigured to squares of light on the general dark body of the night landscape as it absorbed the outlines of the edifice into its gloomy monochrome.

Not another word was spoken for some time, and they climbed a hill, then another hill piled on the summit of the first. An additional mile of plateau followed, from which could be discerned two lighthouses on the coast they were nearing, reposing on the horizon with a calm lustre of benignity. Another oasis was reached; a little dell lay like a nest at their feet, towards which the driver pulled the horse at a sharp angle, and descended a steep slope which dived under the trees like a rabbit's burrow. They sank lower and lower.

“Endelstow Vicarage is inside here,” continued

the man with the reins. "This part about here is West Endelstow; Lord Luxellian's is East Endelstow, and has a church to itself. Pa'son Swancourt is the pa'son of both, and bobs backward and forward. Ah, well! 'tis a funny world. 'A b'lieve there was once a quarry where this house stands. The man who built it in past time scraped all the glebe for earth to put round the vicarage, and laid out a little paradise of flowers and trees in the soil he had got together in this way, whilst the fields he scraped have been good for nothing ever since."

"How long has the present incumbent been here?"

"Maybe about a year, or a year and half: 't isn't two years; for they don't scandalise him yet; and, as a rule, a parish begins to scandalise the pa'son at the end of two years among 'em familiar. But he's a very nice party. Ay, Pa'son Swancourt knows me pretty well from often driving over; and I know Pa'son Swancourt."

They emerged from the bower, swept round in a curve, and the chimneys and gables of the vicarage became darkly visible. Not a light showed anywhere. They alighted; the man felt his way into the porch, and rang the bell.

At the end of three or four minutes, spent in patient waiting without hearing any sounds of a response, the stranger advanced and repeated the call in a more decided manner. He then fancied he heard footsteps in the hall, and sundry movements of the door-knob, but nobody appeared.

"Perhaps they beant at home," sighed the driver.

"And I promised myself a bit of supper in Pa'son Swancourt's kitchen. Sich lovely mate-pize and figged keakes, and cider, and drops o' cordial that they do keep here!"

"All right, naibours! Be ye rich men or be ye poor men, that ye must needs come to the world's end at this time o' night!" exclaimed a voice at this instant; and, turning their heads, they saw a rickety individual shambling round from the back door with a horn lantern dangling from his hand.

"Time o' night, 'a b'lieve! and the clock only gone seven of 'em. Show a light, and let us in, William Worm."

"Oh, that you, Robert Lickpan?"

"Nobody else, William Worm."

"And is the visiting man a-come?"

"Yes," said the stranger. "Is Mr. Swancourt at home?"

"That 'a is, sir. And would ye mind coming round by the back way? The front door is got stuck wi' the wet, as he will do sometimes; and the Turk can't open en. I know I am only a poor wambling man that 'ill never pay the Lord for my making, sir; but I can show the way in, sir."

The new arrival followed his guide through a little door in a wall, and then promenaded a scullery and a kitchen, along which he passed with eyes rigidly fixed in advance, an inbred horror of prying forbidding him to gaze around apartments that formed the back side of the household tapestry. Entering the hall, he was about to be shown to his room, when from the inner lobby of the front

entrance, whither she had gone to learn the cause of the delay, sailed forth the form of Elfride. Her start of amazement at the sight of the visitor coming forth from under the stairs proved that she had not been expecting this surprising flank movement, which had been originated entirely by the ingenuity of William Worm.

She appeared in the prettiest of all feminine guises, that is to say, in demi-toilette, with plenty of loose curly hair tumbling down about her shoulders. An expression of uneasiness pervaded her countenance; and altogether she scarcely appeared woman enough for the situation. The visitor removed his hat, and the first words were spoken; Elfride prelusively looking with a deal of interest, not unmixed with surprise, at the person towards whom she was to do the duties of hospitality.

"I am Mr. Smith," said the stranger in a musical voice.

"I am Miss Swancourt," said Elfride.

Her constraint was over. The great contrast between the reality she beheld before her, and the dark, taciturn, sharp, elderly man of business who had lurked in her imagination—a man with clothes smelling of city smoke, skin sallow from want of sun, and talk flavoured with epigram—was such a relief to her that Elfride smiled, almost laughed, in the new-comer's face.

Stephen Smith, who has hitherto been hidden from us by the darkness, was at this time of his life but a youth in appearance, and barely a man in years. Judging from his look, London was the

last place in the world that one would have imagined to be the scene of his activities: such a face surely could not be nourished amid smoke and mud and fog and dust; such an open countenance could never even have seen anything of "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of Babylon the Second.

His complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupid's bow in form, and as cherry-red in colour as hers. Bright curly hair; bright sparkling blue-gray eyes; a boy's blush and manner; neither whisker nor moustache, unless a little light-brown fur on his upper lip deserved the latter title: this composed the London professional man, the prospect of whose advent had so troubled Elfride.

Elfride hastened to say she was sorry to tell him that Mr. Swancourt was not able to receive him that evening, and gave the reason why. Mr. Smith replied, in a voice boyish by nature and manly by art, that he was very sorry to hear this news; but that as far as his reception was concerned, it did not matter in the least.

Stephen was shown up to his room. In his absence Elfride stealthily glided into her father's.

"He's come, papa. Such a young man for a business man!"

"Oh, indeed!"

"His face is—well—*pretty*; just like mine."

"H'm! what next?"

"Nothing; that's all I know of him yet. It is rather nice, is it not?"

"Well, we shall see that when we know him better. Go down and give the poor fellow something to eat and drink, for Heaven's sake. And when he has done eating, say I should like to have a few words with him, if he doesn't mind coming up here."

The young lady glided downstairs again, and whilst she awaits young Smith's entry, the letters referring to his visit had better be given.

I.—MR. SWANCOURT TO MR. HEWBY.

"ENDELSTOW VICARAGE, *Feb.* 18, 1864.

"SIR,—We are thinking of restoring the tower and aisle of the church in this parish; and Lord Luxellian, the patron of the living, has mentioned your name as that of a trustworthy architect whom it would be desirable to ask to superintend the work.

"I am exceedingly ignorant of the necessary preliminary steps. Probably, however, the first is that (should you be, as Lord Luxellian says you are, disposed to assist us) yourself or some member of your staff come and see the building, and report thereupon for the satisfaction of parishioners and others.

"The spot is a very remote one: we have no railway within fourteen miles; and the nearest place for putting up at—called a town, though merely a large village—is Stranton, two miles farther on; so that it would be most convenient for you to stay at the vicarage—which I am glad to place at your

disposal—instead of pushing on to the hotel at Stranton, and coming back again in the morning.

“Any day of the next week that you like to name for the visit will find us quite ready to receive you.—
Yours very truly, CHRISTOPHER SWANCOURT.”

2.—MR. HEWBY TO MR. SWANCOURT.

“PERCY PLACE, CHARING CROSS,
Feb. 20, 1864.

“DEAR SIR,—Agreeably to your request of the 18th instant, I have arranged to survey and make drawings of the aisle and tower of your parish church, and of the dilapidations which have been suffered to accrue thereto, with a view to its restoration.

“My assistant, Mr. Stephen Smith, will leave London by the early train to-morrow morning for the purpose. Many thanks for your proposal to accommodate him. He will take advantage of your offer, and will probably reach your house at some hour of the evening. You may put every confidence in him, and may rely upon his discernment in the matter of church architecture.

“Trusting that the plans for the restoration, which I shall prepare from the details of his survey, will prove satisfactory to yourself and Lord Luxellian, I am, dear sir, yours faithfully, WALTER HEWBY.”

CHAPTER III.

MELODIOUS BIRDS SING MADRIGALS.

THAT first repast in Endelstow Vicarage was a very agreeable one to young Stephen Smith. The table was spread, as Elfride had suggested to her father, with the materials for the heterogeneous meal called high tea—a class of refecton welcome to all when away from men and towns, and particularly attractive to youthful palates. The table was prettily decked with winter flowers and leaves, amid which the eye was greeted by chops, chicken, pie, &c., and two huge pasties overhanging the sides of the dish with a cheerful aspect of abundance.

At the end, towards the fireplace, appeared the tea-service, of old-fashioned Worcester porcelain, and behind this arose the slight form of Elfride, attempting to add matronly dignity to the movement of pouring out tea, and to have a weighty and concerned look in matters of marmalade, honey, and clotted cream. Having made her own meal before he arrived, she found to her embarrassment that there was nothing left for her to do but talk when not assisting him. She asked him if he would excuse her finishing a letter she had been writing at a side-table, and, after sitting down to it, tingled with a sense of being grossly rude. However, seeing that he noticed nothing personally wrong in her,

and that he too was embarrassed when she attentively watched his cup to refill it, Elfride became better at ease; and when furthermore he accidentally kicked the leg of the table, and then nearly upset his tea-cup, just as schoolboys did, she felt herself mistress of the situation, and could talk very well. In a few minutes ingenuousness and a common term of years obliterated all recollection that they were strangers just met. Stephen began to wax eloquent on extremely slight experiences connected with his professional pursuits; and she, having no experiences to fall back upon, recounted with much animation stories that had been related to her by her father, which would have astonished him had he heard with what fidelity of action and tone they were rendered. Upon the whole, a very interesting picture of Sweet-and-Twenty was on view that evening in Mr. Swancourt's house.

Ultimately Stephen had to go upstairs and talk loud to the vicar, receiving from him between his puffs a great many apologies for calling him so unceremoniously to a stranger's bedroom. "But," continued Mr. Swancourt, "I felt that I wanted to say a few words to you before the morning, on the business of your visit. One's patience gets exhausted by staying a prisoner in bed all day through a sudden freak of one's enemy—new to me, though—for I have known very little of gout as yet. However, he's gone to my other toe in a very mild manner, and I expect he'll slink off altogether by the morning. I hope you have been well attended to downstairs?"

"Perfectly. And though it is unfortunate, and I am sorry to see you laid up, I beg you will not take the slightest notice of my being in the house the while."

"I will not. But I shall be down to-morrow. My daughter is an excellent doctor. A dose or two of her mild mixtures will fetch me round quicker than all the drug stuff in the world. Well, now about the church business. Take a seat, do. We can't afford to stand upon ceremony in these parts as you see, and for this reason, that a civilised human being seldom stays long with us; and so we cannot waste time in approaching him, or he will be gone before we have had the pleasure of close acquaintance. This tower of ours is, as you will notice, entirely gone beyond the possibility of restoration; but the church itself is well enough. You should see some of the churches in this county. Floors rotten: ivy lining the walls."

"Dear me!"

"Oh, that's nothing. The congregation of a neighbour of mine, whenever a storm of rain comes on during service, open their umbrellas and hold them up till the dripping ceases from the roof. Now, if you will kindly bring me those papers and letters you see lying on the table, I will show you how far we have got."

Stephen crossed the room to fetch them, and the vicar seemed to notice more particularly the slim figure of his visitor.

"I suppose you are quite competent?" he said.

"Quite," said the young man, colouring slightly.

"You are very young, I fancy—I should say you are not more than nineteen?"

"I am nearly twenty-one."

"Exactly half my age; I am forty-two."

"By the way," said Mr. Swancourt, after some conversation, "you said your whole name was Stephen Fitzmaurice, and that your grandfather came originally from Caxbury. Since I have been speaking, it has occurred to me that I know something of you. You belong to a well-known ancient county family—not ordinary Smiths in the least."

"I don't think we have any of their blood in our veins."

"Nonsense! you must. Hand me the *Landed Gentry*. Now, let me see. There, Stephen Fitzmaurice Smith—he lies in St. Mary's Church, doesn't he? Well, out of that family sprang the Leaseworthy Smiths, and collaterally came General Sir Stephen Fitzmaurice Smith of Caxbury"—

"Yes; I have seen his monument there," shouted Stephen. "But there is no connection between his family and mine: there cannot be."

"There is none, possibly, to your knowledge. But look at this, my dear sir," said the vicar, striking his fist upon the bedpost for emphasis. "Here are you, Stephen Fitzmaurice Smith, living in London, but springing from Caxbury. Here in this book is a genealogical tree of the Stephen Fitzmaurice Smiths of Caxbury Manor. You may be only a family of professional men now—I am not inquisitive: I don't ask questions of that kind; it is not in me to do so—but it is as plain as the nose in

your face that there's your origin! And, Mr. Smith, I congratulate you upon your blood; blue blood, sir; and, upon my life, a very desirable colour, as the world goes."

"I wish you could congratulate me upon some more tangible quality," said the younger man, sadly no less than modestly.

"Nonsense! that will come with time. You are young: all your life is before you. Now look—see how far back in the mists of antiquity my own family of Swancourt have a root. Here, you see," he continued, turning to the page, "is Geoffrey, the one among my ancestors who lost a barony because he would cut his joke. Ah, it's the sort of us! But the story is too long to tell now. Ay, I'm a poor man—a poor gentleman, in fact: those I would be friends with, won't be friends with me; those who are willing to be friends with me, I am above being friends with. Beyond dining with a neighbouring incumbent or two, and an occasional chat—sometimes dinner—with Lord Luxellian, I am in absolute solitude—absolute."

"You have your studies, your books, and your—daughter."

"Oh yes, yes; and I don't complain of poverty. *Canto coram latrone*. Well, Mr. Smith, don't let me detain you any longer in a sick room. Ha! that reminds me of a story I once heard in my younger days." Here the vicar began a series of small private laughs, and Stephen looked inquiry. "Oh no, no! it is too bad—too bad to tell!" continued Mr. Swancourt in undertones of grim mirth. "Well, go

downstairs; my daughter must do the best she can with you this evening. Ask her to sing to you—she plays and sings very nicely. Good-night; I feel as if I had known you for five or six years. I'll ring for somebody to show you down."

"Never mind," said Stephen, "I can find the way." And he went downstairs, thinking of the delightful freedom of manner in the remoter counties in comparison with the reserve of London.

"I forgot to tell you that my father was rather deaf," said Elfride anxiously, when Stephen entered the little drawing-room.

"Never mind; I know all about it, and we are great friends," the man of business replied enthusiastically. "And, Miss Swancourt, will you kindly sing to me?"

To Miss Swancourt this request seemed, what in fact it was, exceptionally point-blank; though she guessed that her father had some hand in framing it, knowing, rather to her cost, of his unceremonious way of utilising her for the benefit of dull sojourners. At the same time, as Mr. Smith's manner was too frank to provoke criticism, and his age too little to inspire fear, she was ready—not to say pleased—to accede. Selecting from the canterbury some old family ditties, that in years gone by had been played and sung by her mother, Elfride sat down to the pianoforte, and began "'Twas on the evening of a winter's day," in a pretty contralto voice.

"Do you like that old thing, Mr. Smith?" she said at the end.

"Yes, I do much," said Stephen—words he would have uttered, and sincerely, to anything on earth, from glee to requiem, that she might have chosen.

"You shall have a little one by De Leyre, that was given me by a young French lady who was staying at Endelstow House:

'Je l'ai planté, je l'ai vu naître,
Ce beau rosier où les oiseaux,' &c. ;

and then I shall want to give you my own favourite for the very last, Shelley's 'When the lamp is shattered,' as set to music by my poor mother. I so much like singing to anybody who *really* cares to hear me."

Every woman who makes a permanent impression on a man is afterwards recalled to his mind's eye as she appeared in one particular scene, which seems ordained to be her special form of manifestation throughout the pages of his memory. As the patron Saint has her attitude and accessories in mediæval illumination, so the sweetheart may be said to have hers upon the table of her true Love's fancy, without which she is rarely introduced there except by effort; and this though she may, on further acquaintance, have been observed in many other phases which one would imagine to be far more appropriate to love's young dream.

Miss Elfride's image chose the form in which she was beheld during these minutes of singing, for her permanent attitude of visitation to Stephen's eyes during his sleeping and waking hours in after days. The profile is seen of a young woman in a

pale gray silk dress with trimmings of swan's-down, and opening up from a point in front, like a waistcoat without a shirt; the cool colour contrasting admirably with the warm bloom of her neck and face. The furthestmost candle on the piano comes immediately in a line with her head, and half invisible itself, forms the accidentally frizzled hair into a nebulous haze of light, surrounding her crown like an aureola. Her hands are in their place on the keys, her lips parted, and trilling forth, in a tender *diminuendo*, the closing words of the sad apostrophe:

“O Love, who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier!”

Her head is forward a little, and her eyes directed keenly upward to the top of the page of music confronting her. Then comes a rapid look into Stephen's face, and a still more rapid look back again to her business, her face having dropped its sadness, and acquired a certain expression of mischievous archness the while; which lingered there for some time, but was never developed into a positive smile of flirtation.

Stephen suddenly shifted his position from her right hand to her left, where there was just room enough for a small ottoman to stand between the piano and the corner of the room. Into this nook he squeezed himself, and gazed wistfully up into Elfride's face. So long and so earnestly gazed he, that her cheek deepened to a more and more crimson tint as each line was added to her song. Con-

cluding, and pausing motionless after the last word for a minute or two, she ventured to look at him again. His features wore an expression of unutterable heaviness.

"You don't hear many songs, do you, Mr. Smith, to take so much notice of these of mine?"

"Perhaps it was the means and vehicle of the song that I was noticing: I mean yourself," he answered gently.

"Now, Mr. Smith!"

"It is perfectly true; I don't hear much singing. You mistake what I am, I fancy. Because I come as a stranger to a secluded spot, you think I must needs come from a life of bustle, and know the latest movements of the day. But I don't. My life is as quiet as yours, and more solitary: solitary as death."

"The death which comes from a plethora of life? But seriously, I can quite see that you are not the least what I thought you would be before I saw you. You are not critical, or experienced, or—much to mind. That's why I don't mind singing airs to you that I only half know." Finding that by this confession she had vexed him in a way she did not intend, she added naïvely, "I mean, Mr. Smith, that you are better, not worse, for being only young and not very experienced. You don't think my life here so very tame and dull, I know."

"I do not, indeed," he said with fervour. "It must be delightfully poetical, and sparkling, and fresh, and"—

"There you go, Mr. Smith! Well, men of an-

other kind, when I get them to be honest enough to own the truth, think just the reverse: that my life must be a dreadful bore in its normal state, though pleasant for the exceptional few days they pass here."

"I could live here always!" he said, and with such a tone and look of unconscious revelation that Elfride was startled to find that her harmonies had fired a small Troy, in the shape of Stephen's heart. She said quickly:

"But you can't live here always."

"Oh no." And he drew himself in with the sensitiveness of a snail.

Elfride's emotions were sudden as his in kindling, but the least of woman's lesser infirmities—love of admiration—caused an inflammable disposition on his part, so exactly similar to her own, to appear as meritorious in him as modesty made her own seem culpable in her.

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE HEAVES THE TURF IN MANY A MOULD'RING
HEAP.

FOR reasons of his own, Stephen Smith was stirring a short time after dawn the next morning. From the window of his room he could see, first, two bold escarpments sloping down together like the letter V. Towards the bottom, like liquid in a funnel, appeared the sea, gray and small. On the brow of one hill, of rather greater altitude than its neighbour, stood the church which was to be the scene of his operations. The lonely edifice was black and bare, cutting up into the sky from the very tip of the hill. It had a square mouldering tower, owning neither battlement nor pinnacle, and seemed a monolithic termination, of one substance with the ridge, rather than a structure raised thereon. Round the church ran a low wall; over-topping the wall, in general level, was the graveyard; not as a graveyard usually is, a fragment of landscape with its due variety of chiaro-oscuro, but a mere profile against the sky, serrated with the outlines of graves and a very few memorial stones. Not a tree could exist up there; nothing but the monotonous gray-green grass.

Five minutes after this casual survey was made,

his bedroom was empty, and its occupant had vanished quietly from the house.

At the end of two hours he was again in the room, looking warm and glowing. He now pursued the artistic details of dressing, which on his first rising had been entirely omitted. And a very blooming boy he looked, after that mysterious morning scamper. His mouth was a triumph of its class. It was the cleanly-cut, exquisitely pursed-up mouth of William Pitt, as represented in the well or little known bust by Nollekens—a mouth which is in itself a young man's fortune, if properly exercised. His round chin, where its upper part turned inward, still continued its perfect and full curve, seeming to press in to a point the bottom of his nether lip at their place of junction.

Once he murmured the name of Elfride. Ah, there she was! On the lawn in a plain dress, without hat or bonnet, running with a boy's velocity, superadded to a girl's lightness, after a tame rabbit she was endeavouring to capture, her strategic intonations of coaxing words alternating with desperate rushes so much out of keeping with them, that the hollowness of such expressions was but too evident to her pet, who darted and dodged in carefully-timed counterpart.

The scene down there was altogether different from that of the hills. A thicket of shrubs and trees enclosed this favoured spot from the wildness without; even at this time of the year the grass was luxuriant there. No wind blew inside the protecting belt of evergreens, wasting its force upon the

higher and stronger trees forming the outer margin of the grove.

Then he heard a heavy person scuffling about in slippers, and calling "Mr. Smith!" Smith proceeded to the study, and found Mr. Swancourt. The young man expressed his gladness to see his host downstairs.

"Oh yes; I knew I should soon be right again. I have not made the acquaintance of gout for more than two years, and it generally goes off the second night. Well, where have you been this morning? I saw you come in just now, I think?"

"Yes; I have been for a walk."

"Start early?"

"Yes."

"Very early, I think?"

"Yes, it was rather early."

"Which way did you go? To the sea, I suppose. Everybody goes seaward."

"No; I followed up the river as far as the park wall."

"You are different from your kind. Well, I suppose such a wild place is a novelty, and so tempted you out of bed?"

"Not altogether a novelty. I like it."

The youth seemed averse to explanation.

"You must, you must, to go cock-watching the morning after a journey of fourteen or sixteen hours. But there's no accounting for taste, and I am glad to see that yours is no meaner. After breakfast, but not before, I shall be good for a ten miles' walk, Master Smith."

Certainly there seemed nothing exaggerated in that assertion. Mr. Swancourt by daylight showed himself to be a man who, in common with the other two people under his roof, had really strong claims to be considered handsome,—handsome, that is, in the sense in which the moon is bright: the ravines and valleys which, on a close inspection, are seen to diversify its surface being left out of the argument. His face was of a tint that never deepened upon his cheeks nor lightened upon his forehead, but remained uniform throughout; the usual neutral salmon-colour of a man who feeds well—not to say too well—and does not think hard; every pore being in visible working order. His *tout ensemble* was that of a highly-improved class of farmer, dressed up in the wrong clothes; that of a firm-standing perpendicular man, whose fall would have been backwards in direction if he had ever lost his balance.

The vicar's background was at present what a vicar's background should be, his study. Here the consistency ends. All along the chimneypiece were ranged bottles of horse, pig, and cow medicines, and against the wall was a high table, made up of the fragments of an old oak lych-gate. Upon this stood stuffed specimens of owls, divers, and gulls, and over them bunches of wheat and barley ears, labelled with the date of the year that produced them. Some cases and shelves, more or less laden with books, the prominent titles of which were Dr. Brown's "Notes on the Romans," Dr. Smith's "Notes on the Corinthians," and Dr. Robinson's "Notes on the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians," just saved the character

of the place, in spite of a girl's doll's-house standing above them, a marine aquarium in the window, and Elfride's hat hanging in its corner.

"Business, business!" said Mr. Swancourt after breakfast. He began to find it necessary to act the part of a fly-wheel towards the somewhat irregular forces of his visitor.

They prepared to go to the church; the vicar, on second thoughts, mounting his coal-black mare to avoid exerting his foot too much at starting. Stephen said he should want a man to assist him. "Worm!" the vicar shouted.

A minute or two after a voice was heard round the corner of the building, mumbling, "Ah, I used to be strong enough, but 'tis altered now! Well, there, I'm as independent as one here and there, even if they do write 'squire after their names."

"What's the matter?" said the vicar, as William Worm appeared; when the remarks were repeated to him.

"Worm says some very true things sometimes," Mr. Swancourt said, turning to Stephen. "Now, as regards that word 'esquire.' Why, Mr. Smith, that word 'esquire' is gone to the dogs,—used on the letters of every jackanapes who has a black coat. Anything else, Worm?"

"Ay, the folk have begun frying again."

"Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yes," Worm said groaningly to Stephen, "I've got such a noise in my head that there's no living night nor day. 'Tis just for all the world like people frying fish: fry, fry, fry, all day long in my poor

head, till I don't know whe'r I'm here or yonder. There, God A'mighty will find it out sooner or later, I hope, and relieve me."

"Now, my deafness," said Mr. Swancourt impressively, "is a dead silence; but William Worm's is that of people frying fish in his head. Very remarkable, isn't it?"

"I can hear the frying-pan a-fizzing as naterel as life," said Worm corroboratively.

"Yes, it is remarkable," said Mr. Smith.

"Very peculiar, very peculiar," echoed the vicar; and they all then followed the path up the hill, bounded on each side by a little stone wall, from which gleamed fragments of quartz and blood-red marbles, apparently of inestimable value, in their setting of brown alluvium. Stephen walked with the dignity of a man close to the horse's head, Worm stumbled along a stone's throw in the rear, and Elfride was nowhere in particular, yet everywhere; sometimes in front, sometimes behind, sometimes at the sides, hovering about the procession like a butterfly; not definitely engaged in travelling, yet somehow chiming in at points with the general progress.

The vicar explained things as he went on: "The fact is, Mr. Smith, I didn't want this bother of church restoration at all, but it was necessary to do something in self-defence, on account of those d—— dissenters: I use the word in its scriptural meaning, of course, not as an expletive."

"How very odd!" said Stephen, with the concern demanded of serious friendliness.

"Odd? That's nothing to how it is in the parish

of Twinkley. Both the churchwardens are; — there, I won't say what they are; and the clerk and the sexton as well."

"How very strange!" said Stephen.

"Strange? My dear sir, that's nothing to how it is in the parish of Sinnerton. However, as to our own parish, I hope we shall make some progress soon."

"You must trust to circumstances."

"There are no circumstances to trust to. We may as well trust in Providence if we trust at all. But here we are. A wild place, isn't it? But I like it on such days as these."

The churchyard was entered on this side by a stone stile, over which having clambered, you remained still on the wild hill, the within not being so divided from the without as to obliterate the sense of open freedom. A delightful place to be buried in, postulating that delight can accompany a man to his tomb under any circumstances. There was nothing horrible in this churchyard, in the shape of tight mounds bonded with sticks, which shout imprisonment in the ears rather than whisper rest; or trim garden-flowers, which only raise images of people in new black crape and white handkerchiefs coming to tend them; or wheel-marks, which remind us of hearses and mourning coaches; or cypress-bushes, which make a parade of sorrow; or coffin-boards and bones lying behind trees, showing that we are only leaseholders of our graves. No; nothing but long, wild, untutored grass, diversifying the forms of the mounds it covered,—themselves irregularly

shaped, with no eye to effect; the impressive presence of the old mountain that all this was a part of being nowhere excluded by disguising art. Outside were similar slopes and similar grass; and then the serene impassive sea, visible to a width of half the horizon, and meeting the eye with the effect of a vast concave, like the interior of a blue vessel. Detached rusty rocks stood upright near the shore, a collar of foam girding their bases, repeating in its whiteness the plumage of a countless multitude of gulls, restlessly hovering about their tops.

"Now, Worm!" said Mr. Swancourt sharply; and Worm started into an attitude of attention at once to receive orders. Stephen and himself were then left in possession, and the work went on till early in the afternoon, when dinner was announced by Unity of the vicarage kitchen running up the hill without a bonnet.

Elfride did not make her appearance inside the building till late in the afternoon, and came then by special invitation from Stephen during dinner. She looked so intensely *living* and full of movement as she came into the old silent place, that young Smith's world began to be lit by "the purple light" in all its definiteness. Worm was got rid of by sending him to measure the height of the tower.

What could she do but come close—so close that a minute arc of her skirt touched his foot—and ask him how he was getting on with his sketches, and set herself to learn the principles of practical mensuration as applied to irregular buildings? Then

she must ascend the pulpit to re-imagine for the hundredth time how it must seem to be a preacher.

Has the reader ever seen a winsome girl in a pulpit? Perhaps not. The writer knows somebody who has, and he will never forget that sight.

Elfride leant over the side.

"Don't you tell papa, will you, Mr. Smith, if I tell you something?" she said with a sudden impulse to make a confidence.

"Oh no, that I won't," said Mr. Smith, staring up.

"Well, I write papa's sermons for him very often, and he preaches them better than he does his own; and then afterwards he talks to people and to me about what he said in his sermon to-day, and forgets that I wrote it for him. Isn't it absurd?"

"How clever you must be!" said Stephen. "I couldn't write a sermon for the world."

"Oh, it's easy enough," she said, descending from the pulpit and coming close to him to explain more vividly. "You do it like this. Did you ever play a game of forfeits called 'When is it? where is it? what is it?'"

"No, never."

"Ah, that's a pity, because writing a sermon is very much like playing that game. You take the text. You think, why is it? what is it? and so on. You put that down under 'Collectively.' Then you proceed to the First, Secondly, and Thirdly. Papa won't have Fourthlys—says they are all my eye. Then you have a final Collectively, several pages of this being put in great black brackets, writing opposite, '*Leave this out if the farmers are falling asleep.*'"

Then comes your In Conclusion, then A Few Words and I Have Done. Well, all this time you have put on the back of each page, '*Keep your voice down*'—I mean," she added, correcting herself, "that's how I do in papa's sermon-book, because otherwise he gets louder and louder, till at last he shouts like a farmer up a-field. Oh, papa is so funny in some things!"

Then, after this childish burst of confidence, she was frightened, being warned by womanly instinct, which for the moment her ardour had outrun, that she had been too forward towards a comparative stranger.

Elfride saw her father then, and went away into the wind, being caught by a gust as she ascended the churchyard slope, in which gust she had the motions, without the motives, of a hoiden; the grace, without the self-consciousness, of a pirouetter. She conversed for a minute or two with her father, and proceeded homeward, Mr. Swancourt coming on to the church to Stephen. The wind had freshened his warm complexion as it freshens the glow of a brand. He was in a mood of jollity, and watched Elfride down the hill with a smile.

"You little flyaway! you look wild enough now," he said, and turned to Stephen. "But she's not a wild child at all, Mr. Smith. As steady as you; and that you are steady I see from your diligence here."

"I think Miss Swancourt very clever," Stephen observed.

"Yes, she is; certainly, she is," said papa, turn-

ing his voice as much as possible to the neutral tone of disinterested criticism. "Now, Smith, I'll tell you something; but she mustn't know it for the world—not for the world, mind, for she insists upon keeping it a dead secret. Why, *she writes my sermons for me often*, and a very good job she makes of them!"

"She can do anything."

"She can do that. The little rascal has the very trick of the trade. But, mind you, Smith, not a word about it to her, not a single word!"

"Not a word," said Smith.

"Look there," said Mr. Swancourt. "What do you think of my roofing?" He pointed with his walking-stick at the chancel roof.

"Did you do that, sir?"

"Yes, I worked in shirt-sleeves all the time that was going on. I pulled down the old rafters, fixed the new ones, put on the battens, slated the roof, all with my own hands, Worm being my assistant. We worked like slaves, didn't we, Worm?"

"Ay, sure, we did; harder than some here and there—hee, hee!" said William Worm, cropping up from somewhere. "Like slaves, 'a b'lieve—hee, hee! And weren't ye foaming mad, sir, when the nails wouldn't go straight? Mighty I! There, 't isn't so bad to cuss and keep it in as to cuss and let it out, is it, sir?"

"Well—why?"

"Because you, sir, when ye were a-putting on the roof, only used to cuss in your mind, which is, I suppose, no harm at all."

"I don't think you know what goes on in my mind, Worm."

"Oh, doan't I, sir—hee, hee! Maybe I'm but a poor wambling thing, sir, and can't read much; but I can spell as well as some here and there. Doan't ye mind, sir, that blusterous night when ye asked me to hold the candle to ye in yer workshop, when you were making a new chair for the chancel?"

"Yes; what of that?"

"I stood with the candle, and you said you liked company, if 'twas only a dog or cat—maning me; and the chair wouldn't do nohow."

"Ah, I remember."

"No; the chair wouldn't do nohow. 'A was very well to look at; but, Lord!"

"Worm, how often have I corrected you for irreverent speaking?"

"—'A was very well to look at, but you couldn't sit in the chair nohow. 'Twas all a-twist wi' the chair, like the letter Z, directly you sat down upon the chair. 'Get up, Worm,' says you, when you seed the chair go all a-sway wi' me. Up you took the chair, and flung en like fire and brimstone to t'other end of your shop—all in a passion. 'Damn the chair!' says I. 'Just what I was thinking,' says you, sir. 'I could see it in your face, sir,' says I, 'and I hope you and God will forgi'e me for saying what you wouldn't. To save your life you couldn't help laughing, sir, at a poor wambler reading your thoughts so plain. Ay, I'm as wise as one here and there."

"I thought you had better have a practical man to go over the church and tower with you," Mr. Swancourt said to Stephen the following morning, "so I got Lord Luxellian's permission to send for a man when you came. I told him to be there at ten o'clock. He's a very intelligent man, and he will tell you all you want to know about the state of the walls. His name is John Smith."

Elfride did not like to be seen again at the church with Stephen. "I will watch here for your appearance at the top of the tower," she said laughingly. "I shall see your figure against the sky."

"And when I am up there I'll wave my handkerchief to you, Miss Swancourt," said Stephen, showing the pleasure he felt. "In twelve minutes from this present moment," he said, looking at his watch, "I'll be at the summit and look out for you."

She went round to the corner of the shrubbery, whence she could watch him down the slope leading to the foot of the hill on which the church stood. There she saw waiting for him a white spot—a mason in his working clothes. Stephen met this man and stopped.

To her surprise, instead of their moving on to the churchyard, they both leisurely sat down upon a stone close by their meeting-place, and remained as if in deep conversation. Elfride looked at the time: nine of the twelve minutes had passed, and Stephen showed no signs of moving. More minutes passed—she grew cold with waiting, and shivered. It was not till the end of a quarter of an hour that

they began to slowly wend up the hill at a snail's pace.

"Rude and unmannerly!" she said to herself, colouring with pique. "Anybody would think he was in love with that horrid mason instead of with"——

The sentence remained unspoken, though not unthought.

She returned to the porch.

"Is the man you sent for a lazy, sit-still, do-nothing kind of man?" she inquired of her father.

"No," he said surprised; "quite the reverse. He is Lord Luxellian's master-mason, John Smith."

"Oh," said Elfride indifferently, and returned towards her bleak station, and waited and shivered again. It was a trifle, after all—a childish thing—looking out from a tower and waving a handkerchief. But her new friend had promised, and why should he tease her so? The effect of a blow is as proportionate to the texture of the object struck as to its own momentum; and she had such a superlative capacity for being wounded that little hits struck her hard.

It was not till the end of half an hour that two figures were seen within the parapet of the dreary old pile, motionless as bitterns on a ruined mosque. Even then Stephen was not true enough to perform what he was so courteous to promise, and he vanished without making a sign.

He returned at midday. Elfride looked vexed when unconscious that his eyes were upon her; when conscious, severe. However, her attitude of

coldness had long outlived the coldness itself, and she could no longer utter feigned words of indifference.

"Ah, you weren't kind to keep me waiting in the cold, and break your promise," she said at last reproachfully, in tones too low for her father's powers of hearing.

"Forgive, forgive me!" said Stephen with dismay. "I had forgotten—quite forgotten! Something prevented my remembering."

"Any further explanation?" said Miss Capricious, pouting.

He was silent for a few minutes, and looked askance.

"None," he said, with the accent of one who concealed a sin.

CHAPTER V.

BOSOM'D HIGH IN TUFTED TREES.

It was breakfast time.

As seen from the vicarage dining-room, which took a warm tone of light from the fire, the weather and scene outside seemed to have stereotyped themselves in unrelieved shades of gray. The long-armed trees and shrubs of juniper, cedar, and pine varieties, were grayish-black; those of the broad-leaved sort, together with the herbage, were grayish-green; the eternal hills and tower behind them were grayish-brown; the sky dropping behind all, gray of the purest melancholy.

Yet in spite of this sombre artistic effect, the morning was not one which tended to lower the spirits. It was even cheering. For it did not rain, nor was rain likely to fall for many days to come.

When, in an English country-house, our different fractions of consciousness are examined, rain or no rain is after all found to be the *primum mobile* of mood, apart from great afflictions; and mental conclusions affecting our humours at such times, which seem drawn from independent incidents, are really but extreme corollaries of one of those atmospheric conditions.

Elfride had turned from the table towards the fire, and was idly elevating a hand-screen before

her face, when she heard the click of a little gate outside.

"Ah, here's the postman!" she said, as a shuffling, active man came through an opening in the shrubbery and across the lawn. She vanished, and met him in the porch, afterwards coming in with her hands behind her back.

"How many are there? Three for papa, one for Mr. Smith, none for Miss Swancourt. And, papa, look here, one of yours is from—whom do you think?—Lord Luxellian. And it has something *hard* in it—a lump of something. I've been feeling it through the envelope, and can't think what it is."

"What does Lord Luxellian write for, I wonder?" Mr. Swancourt had said simultaneously with her words. He handed Stephen his letter, and took his own, putting on his countenance a higher class of look than was customary, as became a poor gentleman who was going to read a letter from a peer.

Stephen read his missive with a countenance quite the reverse of the vicar's.

"PERCY PLACE, *Thursday Evening*.

"DEAR SMITH,—Old H. is in a towering rage with you for being so long about the church sketches. Swears you are more trouble than you are worth. He says I am to write and say you are to stay no longer on any consideration—that he would have done it all in three hours very easily. I told him that you were not like an experienced hand, which he seemed to forget, but it did not make much difference. However, between you and me privately,

if I were you I would not alarm myself for a day or so, if I were not inclined to return. I would make out the week and finish my spree. He will blow up just as much if you appear here on Saturday as if you keep away till Monday morning.—Yours very truly,

“SIMPKINS JENKINS.”

“Dear me—very awkward!” said Stephen, rather *en l’air*, and confused with the kind of confusion that assails an under-strapper when he has been enlarged by accident to the dimensions of a superior, and is somewhat rudely pared down to his original size.

“What is awkward?” said Miss Swancourt.

Smith by this time recovered his equanimity, and with it the professional dignity of an experienced architect.

“Important business demands my immediate presence in London, I regret to say,” he replied.

“What! Must you go at once?” said Mr. Swancourt, looking over the edge of his letter. “Important business? A young fellow like you to have important business!”

“The truth is,” said Stephen blushing, and rather ashamed of having pretended even so slightly to a consequence which did not rightly belong to him,—“the truth is, Mr. Hewby has sent to say I am to come home; and I must obey him.”

“I see; I see. It is politic to do so, you mean. Now I can see more than you think. You are to be his partner. I booked you for that directly I

read his letter to me the other day, and the way he spoke of you. He thinks a great deal of you, Mr. Smith, or he wouldn't be so anxious for your return."

Unpleasant to Stephen such remarks as these could not sound; to have the expectancy of partnership with one of the largest-practising architects in London thrust upon him was cheering, however untenable he felt the idea to be. He saw that, whatever Mr. Hewby might think, Mr. Swancourt certainly thought much of him to entertain such an idea on such slender ground as to be absolutely no ground at all. And then, unaccountably, his speaking face exhibited a cloud of sadness, which a reflection on the remoteness of any such contingency could hardly have sufficed to cause.

Elfride was struck with that look of his; even Mr. Swancourt noticed it.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "never mind that now. You must come again on your own account; not on business. Come to see me as a visitor, you know—say, in your holidays—all you town men have holidays like schoolboys. When are they?"

"In August, I believe."

"Very well; come in August; and then you need not hurry away so. I am glad to get somebody decent to talk to, or at, in this outlandish *ultima Thule*. But, by the by, I have something to say—you won't go to-day?"

"No; I need not," said Stephen hesitatingly. "I am not obliged to get back before Monday morning."

"Very well, then, that brings me to what I am

going to propose. This is a letter from Lord Luxellian. I think you heard me speak of him as the resident landowner in this district, and patron of this living?"

"I—know of him."

"He is in London now. It seems that he has run up on business for a day or two, and taken Lady Luxellian with him. He has written to ask me to go to his house, and search for a paper among his private memoranda, which he forgot to take with him."

"What did he send in the letter?" inquired Elfride.

"The key of a private desk in which the papers are. He doesn't like to trust such a matter to anybody else. I have done such things for him before. And what I propose is, that we make an afternoon of it—all three of us. Go for a drive to Targan Bay, come home by way of Endelstow House; and whilst I am looking over the documents you can ramble about the rooms where you like. I have the run of the house at any time, you know. The building, though nothing but a mass of gables outside, has a splendid hall, staircase, and gallery within; and there are a few good pictures."

"Yes, there are," said Stephen.

"Have you seen the place, then?"

"I saw it as I came by," he said hastily.

"Oh yes; but I was alluding to the interior. And the church—St. Eval's—is much older than our St. Agnes' here. I do duty in that and this alternately, you know. The fact is, I ought to have

some help; riding across that park for two miles on a wet morning is not at all the thing. If my constitution were not well seasoned, as thank God it is,"—here Mr. Swancourt looked down his front, as if his constitution were visible there,—“I should be coughing and barking all the year round. And when the family goes away, there are only about three servants to preach to when I get there. Well, that shall be the arrangement, then. Elfride, you will like to go?”

Elfride assented; and the little breakfast-party separated. Stephen rose to go and take a few final measurements at the church, the vicar following him to the door with a mysterious expression of inquiry on his face.

“You’ll put up with our not having family prayer this morning, I hope?” he whispered.

“Yes; quite so,” said Stephen.

“To tell you the truth,” he continued in the same undertone, “we don’t make a regular thing of it; but when we have strangers visiting us, I am strongly of opinion that it is the proper thing to do, and I always do it. I am very strict on that point. But you, Smith, there is something in your face which makes me feel quite at home; no nonsense about you, in short. Ah, it reminds me of a splendid story I used to hear when I was a helter-skelter young fellow—such a story! But”—here the vicar shook his head self-forbiddingly, and grimly laughed.

“Was it a good story?” said young Smith, smiling too.

"Oh yes; but 'tis too bad—too bad! Couldn't tell it to you for the world!"

Stephen went across the lawn, hearing the vicar chuckling privately at the recollection as he withdrew.

They started at three o'clock. The gray morning had resolved itself into an afternoon bright with a pale pervasive sunlight, without the sun itself being visible. Lightly they trotted along—the wheels nearly silent, the horse's hoofs clapping, almost ringing, upon the hard, white, turnpike road as it followed the level ridge in a perfectly straight line, seeming to be absorbed ultimately by the white of the sky.

Targan Bay—which had the merit of being easily got at—was duly visited. They then swept round by innumerable lanes, in which not twenty consecutive yards were either straight or level, to the domain of Lord Luxellian. A woman with a double chin and thick neck, like Queen Anne by Dahl, threw open the lodge gate, a little boy standing behind her.

"I'll give him something, poor little fellow," said Elfride, pulling out her purse and hastily opening it. From the interior of her purse a host of bits of paper, like a flock of white birds, floated into the air, and were blown about in all directions.

"Well, to be sure!" said Stephen with a slight laugh.

"What the dickens is all that?" said Mr. Swancourt. "Not halves of bank-notes, Elfride?"

Elfride looked annoyed and guilty. "They are only something of mine, papa," she faltered, whilst Stephen leapt out, and, assisted by the lodge-keeper's little boy, crept about round the wheels and horse's hoofs till the papers were all gathered together again. He handed them back to her, and remounted.

"I suppose you are wondering what those scraps were?" she said, as they bowled along up the sycamore avenue. "And so I may as well tell you. They are notes for a romance I am writing."

She could not help colouring at the confession, much as she tried to avoid it.

"A story, do you mean?" said Stephen, Mr. Swancourt half listening, and catching a word of the conversation now and then.

"Yes; the *Court of Kellyon Castle*; a romance of the fifteenth century. Such writing is out of date now, I know; but I like doing it."

"A romance carried in a purse! If a highwayman were to rob you, he would be taken in."

"Yes; that's my way of carrying manuscript. The real reason is, that I mostly write bits of it on scraps of paper when I am on horseback; and I put them there for convenience."

"What are you going to do with your romance when you have written it?" said Stephen.

"I don't know," she replied, and turned her head to look at the prospect.

For by this time they had reached the precincts of Endelstow House. Driving through an ancient gateway of dun-coloured stone, spanned by the high-shouldered Tudor arch, they found themselves in a

spacious court, closed by a façade on each of its three sides. The substantial portions of the existing building dated from the reign of Henry VIII.; but the picturesque and sheltered spot had been the site of an erection of a much earlier date. A licence to crenellate *mansum infra manerium suum* was granted by Edward II. to "Hugo Luxellen chivaler;" but though the faint outline of the ditch and mound was visible at points, no sign of the original building remained.

The windows on all sides were long and many-mullioned; the roof lines broken up by dormer lights of the same pattern. The apex stones of these dormers, together with those of the gables, were surmounted by grotesque figures in rampant, passant, and couchant variety. Tall octagonal and twisted chimneys thrust themselves high up into the sky, surpassed in height, however, by some poplars and sycamores at the back, which showed their gently-rocking summits over ridge and parapet. In the corners of the court polygonal bays, whose surfaces were entirely occupied by buttresses and windows, broke into the squareness of the enclosure; and a far-projecting oriel, springing from a fantastic series of mouldings, overhung the archway of the chief entrance to the house.

As Mr. Swancourt had remarked, he had the freedom of the mansion in the absence of its owner. Upon a statement of his errand, they were all admitted to the library and left entirely to themselves. Mr. Swancourt was soon up to his eyes in the examination of a heap of papers he had taken from

the cabinet described by his correspondent. Stephen and Elfride had nothing to do but to wander till her father was ready.

Elfride entered the gallery, and Stephen followed her without seeming to do so. It was a long sombre apartment, enriched with fittings a century or so later in style than the walls of the mansion. Pilasters of Renaissance workmanship supported a cornice from which sprang a curved ceiling, panelled in the awkward twists and curls of the period. The old Gothic quarries still remained in the upper portion of the large window at the end, though they had made way for a more modern form of glazing elsewhere.

Stephen was at one end of the gallery looking towards Elfride, who stood in the midst, beginning to feel somewhat depressed by the society of Luxellian shades of cadaverous complexion fixed by Holbein, Kneller, and Lely, and seeming to gaze at and through her in a moralising mood. The silence, which was almost a spell upon them, was broken by the sudden opening of a door at the far end.

Out bounded a pair of little girls, lightly yet warmly dressed. Their eyes were sparkling; their hair swinging about and around; their red mouths laughing with unalloyed gladness.

"Ah, Miss Swancourt! dearest Elfie! we heard you. Are you going to stay here? You are our little mamma, are you not—our big mamma is gone to London," said one.

"Let me tiss you," said the other, in appearance very much like the first, but to a smaller pattern.

Their pink cheeks and yellow hair were speedily intermingled with the folds of Elfride's dress; she then stooped and tenderly embraced them both.

"Such an odd thing," said Elfride smiling, and turning to Stephen. "They have taken it into their heads lately to call me 'little mamma,' because I am very fond of them, and wore a dress the other day something like one of Lady Luxellian's."

These two young creatures were the Honourable Mary and the Honourable Kate—scarcely appearing large enough as yet to bear the weight of such ponderous prefixes. They were the only two children of Lord and Lady Luxellian, and, as it proved, had been left at home during their parents' temporary absence, in the custody of nurse and governess. Lord Luxellian was dotingly fond of the children: rather indifferent towards his wife, since she had begun to show an inclination not to please him by giving him a boy.

All children instinctively ran after Elfride, looking upon her more as an unusually nice large specimen of their own tribe than as a grown-up elder. It had now become an established rule, that whenever she met them—indoors or out-of-doors, weekdays or Sundays—they were to be severally pressed against her face and bosom for the space of a quarter of a minute, and otherwise made much of on the delightful system of cumulative epithet and caress to which unpractised girls will occasionally abandon themselves.

A look of misgiving by the youngsters towards the door by which they had entered directed atten-

tion to a maid-servant, appearing from the same quarter to put an end to this sweet freedom of the poor Honourables Mary and Kate.

"I wish you lived here, Miss Swancourt," piped one like a melancholy bullfinch.

"So do I," piped the other like a rather more melancholy bullfinch. "Mamma can't play with us so nicely as you do. I don't think she ever learnt playing when she was little. When shall we come to see you?"

"As soon as you like, dears."

"And sleep at your house all night? That's what I mean by coming to see you. I don't care to see people with hats and bonnets on, and all standing up and walking about."

"As soon as we can get mamma's permission you shall come and stay as long as ever you like. Good-bye!"

The prisoners were then led off, Elfride again turning her attention to her guest, whom she had left standing at the remote end of the gallery. On looking around for him he was nowhere to be seen. Elfride stepped down to the library, thinking he might have rejoined her father there. But Mr. Swancourt, now cheerfully illuminated by a pair of candles, was still alone, untying packets of letters and papers, and tying them up again.

As Elfride did not stand on a sufficiently intimate footing with the object of her interest to justify her, as a proper young lady, to commence the active search for him that youthful impulsiveness prompted, and as, nevertheless, for a nascent reason

connected with those divinely-cut lips of his, she did not like him to be absent from her side, she wandered desultorily back to the oak staircase, pouting and casting her eyes about in hope of discerning his boyish figure.

Though daylight still prevailed in the rooms, the corridors were in a depth of shadow—chill, sad, and silent; and it was only by looking along them towards light spaces beyond that anything or anybody could be discerned therein. One of these light spots she found to be caused by a side-door with glass panels in the upper part. Elfride opened it, and found herself confronting a secondary or inner lawn, separated from the principal lawn front by a shrubbery.

And now she saw a perplexing sight. At right-angles to the face of the wing she had emerged from, and within a few feet of the door, jutted out another wing of the mansion, lower and with less architectural character. Immediately opposite to her, in the wall of this wing, was a large broad window, having its blind drawn down, and illuminated by a light in the room it screened.

On the blind was a shadow from somebody close inside it—a person in profile. The profile was unmistakably that of Stephen. It was just possible to see that his arms were uplifted, and that his hands held an article of some kind. Then another shadow appeared—also in profile—and came close to him. This was the shadow of a woman. She turned her back towards Stephen: he lifted and held out what now proved to be a shawl or mantle—placed it care-

fully—so carefully—round the lady; disappeared; reappeared in her front—fastened the mantle. Did he then kiss her? Surely not. Yet the motion *might* have been a kiss. Then both shadows swelled to colossal dimensions—grew distorted—vanished.

Two minutes elapsed.

“Ah, Miss Swancourt! I am so glad to find you. I was looking for you,” said a voice at her elbow—Stephen’s voice. She stepped into the passage.

“Do you know any of the members of this establishment?” said she.

“Not a single one: how should I?” he replied.

CHAPTER VI.

FARE THEE WEEL AWHILE!

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the conclusion of Stephen's remark, the sound of the closing of an external door in their immediate neighbourhood reached Elfride's ears. It came from the farther side of the wing containing the illuminated room. She then discerned, by the aid of the dusky departing light, a figure, whose sex was undistinguishable, walking down the gravelled path by the parterre towards the river. The figure grew fainter, and vanished under the trees.

Mr. Swancourt's voice was heard calling out their names from a distant corridor in the body of the building. They retraced their steps, and found him with his coat buttoned up and his hat on, awaiting their advent in a mood of self-satisfaction at having brought his search to a successful close. The carriage was brought round, and without further delay the trio drove away from the mansion, under the echoing gateway arch, and along by the leafless sycamores, as the stars began to kindle their trembling lights behind the maze of branches and twigs.

No words were spoken either by youth or maiden. Her unpractised mind was completely occupied in fathoming its recent acquisition relative to her com-

panion. The young man who had inspired her with such novelty of mode in relation to himself, having come directly from London on business to her father, having been brought by chance to Endlestow House, had, by some means or other, acquired the privilege of approaching some lady he had found therein, and of honouring her by *petits soins* of a marked kind,—all in the space of half an hour.

What room were they standing in? thought Elfride. As nearly as she could guess, it was Lord Luxellian's business-room, or office. What people were in the house? None but the governess and servants, as far as she knew, and of these he had professed a total ignorance. Had the person she had indistinctly seen leaving the house anything to do with the performance? It was impossible to say without appealing to the culprit himself, and that she would never do. The more Elfride reflected, the more certain did it appear that the meeting was a chance rencounter, and not an appointment. And passing again to the ultimate inquiry as to the individuality of the female, Elfride at once assumed that she could not be an inferior. Stephen Smith was not the man to care about passages-at-love with women beneath him. Though gentle, ambition was visible in his kindling eyes; he evidently hoped for much; hoped indefinitely, but extensively. Elfride was puzzled, and being puzzled, was, by a natural sequence of girlish sensations, vexed with him. No more pleasure came in recognising that from liking to attract him she was getting on to love him, boyish as he was and innocent as he had seemed.

They reached the bridge which formed a link between the eastern and western halves of the parish. Situated in a valley that was bounded outwardly by the sea, it formed a point of depression from which the road ascended with great steepness to West Endelstow and the Vicarage. There was no absolute necessity for either of them to alight, but as it was the vicar's custom after a long journey to humour the horse in making this winding ascent, Elfride, moved by an imitative instinct, suddenly jumped out when Pleasant had just begun to adopt the deliberate stalk he associated with this portion of the road.

The young man seemed glad of any excuse for breaking the silence. "Why, Miss Swancourt, what a risky thing to do!" he exclaimed, immediately following her example by jumping down on the other side.

"Oh no, not at all," replied she coldly; the shadow phenomenon at Endelstow House still paramount within her.

Stephen walked along by himself for two or three minutes, wrapped in the rigid reserve dictated by her tone. Then apparently thinking that it was only for girls to pout, he came serenely round to her side, and offered his arm, with Castilian gallantry, to assist her in ascending the remaining three-quarters of the steep.

Here was a temptation: it was the first time in her life that Elfride had been treated as a grown-up woman in this way—offered an arm in a manner implying that she had a right to refuse it. Till tonight she had never received masculine attentions beyond those which might be contained in such

homely remarks as "Elfride, give me your hand;" "Elfride, take hold of my arm," from her father. Her callow heart made an epoch of the incident; she considered her array of feelings, for and against. Collectively they were for taking this offered arm; the single one of pique determined her to punish Stephen by refusing.

"No, thank you, Mr. Smith; I can get along better by myself."

It was Elfride's first fragile attempt at browbeating a lover. Fearing more the issue of such an undertaking than what a gentle young man might think of her waywardness, she immediately afterwards determined to please herself by reversing her statement.

"On second thoughts, I will take it," she said.

They slowly went their way up the hill, a few yards behind the carriage.

"How silent you are, Miss Swancourt!" Stephen observed.

"Perhaps I think you silent too," she returned.

"I may have reason to be."

"Scarcely; it is sadness that makes people silent, and you can have none."

"You don't know: I have a trouble; though some might think it less a trouble than a dilemma."

"What is it?" she asked impulsively.

Stephen hesitated. "I might tell," he said; "at the same time, perhaps, it is as well"——

She let go his arm and imperatively pushed it from her, tossing her head. She had just learnt that a good deal of dignity is lost by asking a ques-

tion to which an answer is refused, even ever so politely; for though politeness does good service in cases of requisition and compromise, it but little helps a direct refusal. "I don't wish to know anything of it; I don't wish it," she went on. "The carriage is waiting for us at the top of the hill; we must get in;" and Elfride flitted to the front. "Papa, here is your Elfride!" she exclaimed to the dusky figure of the old gentleman, as she sprang up and sank by his side without deigning to accept aid from Stephen.

"Ah, yes!" uttered the vicar in artificially alert tones, awaking from a most profound sleep, and suddenly preparing to alight.

"Why, what *are* you doing, papa? We are not home yet."

"Oh no, no; of course not; we are not at home yet," Mr. Swancourt said very hastily, endeavouring to dodge back to his original position with the air of a man who had not moved at all. "The fact is I was so lost in deep meditation that I forgot whereabouts we were." And in a minute the vicar was snoring again.

That evening, being the last, seemed to throw an exceptional shade of sadness over Stephen Smith, and the repeated injunctions of the vicar, that he was to come and revisit them in the summer, apparently tended less to raise his spirits than to unearth some misgiving.

He left them in the gray light of dawn, whilst the colours of earth were sombre, and the sun was

yet hidden in the east. Elfride had fidgeted all night in her little bed lest none of the household should be awake soon enough to start him, and also lest she might miss seeing again the bright eyes and curly hair, to which their owner's possession of a hidden mystery added a deeper tinge of romance. To some extent—so soon does womanly interest take a solicitous turn—she felt herself responsible for his safe conduct. They breakfasted before daylight; Mr. Swancourt, being more and more taken with his guest's ingenious appearance, having determined to rise early and bid him a friendly farewell. It was, however, rather to the vicar's astonishment that he saw Elfride walk in to the breakfast-table, candle in hand.

Whilst William Worm performed his toilet (during which performance the inmates of the vicarage were always in the habit of waiting with exemplary patience), Elfride wandered desultorily to the summer-house. Stephen followed her thither. The copse-covered valley was visible from this position, a mist now lying all along its length, hiding the stream which trickled through it, though the observers themselves were in clear air.

They stood close together, leaning over the rustic balustrading which bounded the arbour on the outward side, and formed the crest of a steep slope beneath. Elfride constrainedly pointed out some features of the distant uplands rising irregularly opposite. But the artistic eye was, either from nature or circumstance, very faint in Stephen now, and he only half attended to her description, as if he

spared time from some other thought going on within him.

"Well, good-bye," he said suddenly; "I must never see you again, I suppose, Miss Swancourt, in spite of invitations."

His genuine tribulation played directly upon the delicate chords of her nature. She could afford to forgive him for a concealment or two. Moreover, the shyness which would not allow him to look her in the face lent bravery to her own eyes and tongue.

"Oh, *do* come again, Mr. Smith!" she said prettily.

"I should delight in it; but it will be better if I do not."

"Why?"

"Certain circumstances in connection with me make it undesirable. Not on my account; on yours."

"Goodness! As if anything in connection with you could hurt me," she said with serene supremacy; but seeing that this plan of treatment was inappropriate, she tuned a smaller note. "Ah, I know why you will not come. You don't want to. You'll go home to London and to all the stirring people there, and will never want to see us any more."

"You know I have no such reason."

"And go on writing letters to the lady you are engaged to, just as before."

"What does that mean? I am not engaged."

"You wrote a letter to a Miss Somebody; I saw it in the letter-rack."

"Pooh! an elderly woman who keeps a stationer's

shop; and it was to tell her to keep my newspaper till I get back."

"You needn't have explained: it was not my business at all." Miss Elfride was rather relieved to hear that statement, nevertheless. "And you won't come again to see my father?" she insisted.

"I should like to—and to see you again, but"—

"Will you reveal to me that matter you hide?" she interrupted petulantly.

"No; not now."

She could not but go on, graceless as it might seem.

"Tell me this," she importuned with a trembling mouth. "Does any meeting of yours with a lady at Endelstow House clash with—any interest you may take in me?"

He started a little. "It does not," he said emphatically; and looked into the pupils of her eyes with the confidence that only honesty can give, and even that to youth alone.

The explanation had not come, but a gloom left her. She could not but believe that utterance. Whatever enigma might lie in the shadow on the blind, it was not an enigma of underhand passion.

She turned towards the house, entering it through the conservatory. Stephen went round to the front door. Mr. Swancourt was standing on the step in his slippers. Worm was adjusting a buckle in the harness, and murmuring about his poor head; and everything was ready for Stephen's departure.

"You named August for your visit. August it

shall be; that is, if you care for the society of such a fossilised Tory," said Mr. Swancourt.

Mr. Smith only responded hesitatingly, that he should like to come again.

"You said you would, and you must," insisted Elfride, coming to the door and speaking under her father's arm.

Whatever reason the youth may have had for not wishing to enter the house as a guest, it no longer predominated. He promised, and bade them adieu, and got into the pony-carriage, which crept up the slope, and bore him out of their sight.

"I never was so much taken with anybody in my life as I am with that young fellow—never! I cannot understand it—can't understand it anyhow," said Mr. Swancourt quite energetically to himself; and went indoors.

CHAPTER VII.

NO MORE OF ME YOU KNEW, MY LOVE!

STEPHEN SMITH revisited Endelstow Vicarage, agreeably to his promise. He had a genuine artistic reason for coming, though no such reason seemed to be required. Six-and-thirty old seat ends, of exquisite fifteenth-century workmanship, were rapidly decaying in an aisle of the church; and it became politic to make drawings of their worm-eaten contours ere they were battered past recognition in the turmoil of the so-called restoration.

He entered the house at sunset, and the world was pleasant again to the two fair-haired ones. A momentary pang of disappointment had, nevertheless, passed through Elfride when she casually discovered that he had not come that minute post-haste from London, but had reached the neighbourhood the previous evening. Surprise would have accompanied the feeling, had she not remembered that several tourists were haunting the coast at this season, and that Stephen might have chosen to do likewise.

They did little besides chat that evening, Mr. Swancourt beginning to question his visitor, closely yet paternally, and in good part, on his hopes and prospects from the profession he had embraced.

Stephen gave vague answers. The next day it rained. In the evening, when twenty-four hours of Elfride had completely rekindled her admirer's ardour, a game of chess was proposed between them.

The game had its value in helping on the developments of their future.

Elfride soon perceived that her opponent was but a learner. She next noticed that he had a very odd way of handling the pieces when castling or taking a man. Antecedently she would have supposed that the same performance must be gone through by all players in the same manner; she was taught by his differing action that all ordinary players, who learn the game by sight, unconsciously touch the men in a stereotyped way. This impression of indescribable oddness in Stephen's touch culminated in speech when she saw him, at the taking of one of her bishops, push it aside with the taking man instead of lifting it as a preliminary to the move.

"How strangely you handle the men, Mr. Smith!"

"Do I? I am sorry for that."

"Oh no—don't be sorry; it is not a matter great enough for sorrow. But who taught you to play?"

"Nobody, Miss Swancourt," he said respectfully. "I learnt from a book lent me by my friend Mr. Knight, the noblest man in the world."

"But you have seen people play?"

"I have never seen the playing of a single game. This is the first time I ever had the opportunity of playing with a living opponent. I have worked out

many games from books, and studied the reasons of the different moves, but that is all."

This was a full explanation of his mannerism; but the fact that a man with the desire for chess should have grown up without being able to see or engage in a game astonished her not a little. She pondered on the circumstance for some time, looking into vacancy and hindering the play.

Mr. Swancourt was sitting with his eyes fixed on the board, but apparently thinking of other things. Half to himself he said, pending the move of Elfride:

"*Quæ finis aut quod me manet stipendium?*"

Stephen replied instantly:

"*Effare! jussas cum fide poenas luam.*"

"Excellent — prompt — gratifying!" said Mr. Swancourt with feeling, bringing down his hand upon the table, and making three pawns and a knight dance over their borders by the shaking. "I was musing on those words as applicable to a strange course I am steering—but enough of that. I am delighted with you, Mr. Smith, for it is so seldom in this desert that I meet with a man who is gentleman and scholar enough to continue a quotation, however trite it may be."

"I also apply the words to myself," said Stephen quietly.

"You? The last man in the world to do that, I should have thought."

"Come," murmured Elfride poutingly, and insinuating herself between them, "tell me all about it. Come, construe, construe!"

Stephen looked steadfastly into her face, and said slowly, and in a voice full of a far-off meaning that seemed quaintly premature in one so young:

“Quæ finis *What will be the end*, aut or, quod stipendium *what fine*, manet me *await me?* Effare *Speak out*; luam *I will pay*, cum fide *with faith*, jussas poenas *the penalty required.*”

The vicar, who had listened with a critical compression of the lips to this school-boy recitation, and by reason of his imperfect hearing had missed the marked realism of Stephen's tone in the English words, now said hesitatingly: “By the by, Mr. Smith (I know you'll excuse my curiosity), though your translation was unexceptionably correct and close, you have a way of pronouncing your Latin which to me seems most peculiar. Not that the pronunciation of a dead language is of much importance; yet your accents and quantities have a grotesque sound to my ears. I thought first that you had acquired your way of breathing the vowels from some of the northern colleges; but it cannot be so with the quantities. What I was going to ask was, if your instructor in the classics could possibly have been an Oxford or Cambridge man?”

“Yes; he was an Oxford man—Fellow of St. Cyprian's.”

“Really?”

“Oh yes; there's no doubt about it.”

“The oddest thing ever I heard of!” said Mr. Swancourt, starting with astonishment. “That the pupil of such a man”——

"The best and cleverest man in England!" cried Stephen enthusiastically.

—"That the pupil of such a man should pronounce Latin in the way you pronounce it beats all I ever heard. How long did he instruct you?"

"Four years."

"Four years!"

"It is not so strange when I explain," Stephen hastened to say. "It was done in this way—by letter. I sent him exercises and construing twice a week, and twice a week he sent them back to me corrected, with marginal notes of instruction. That is how I learnt my Latin and Greek, such as it is. He is not responsible for my scanning. He has never heard me scan a line."

"A novel case, and a singular instance of patience!" cried the vicar.

"On his part, not on mine. Ah, Henry Knight is one in a thousand! I remember his speaking to me on this very subject of pronunciation. He says that, much to his regret, he sees a time coming when every man will pronounce even the common words of his own tongue as seems right in his own eyes, and be thought none the worse for it; that the speaking age is passing away, to make room for the writing age."

Both Elfride and her father had waited attentively to hear Stephen go on to what would have been the most interesting part of the story, namely, what circumstances could have necessitated such an unusual method of education. But no further explanation was volunteered; and they saw, by the

young man's manner of concentrating himself upon the chessboard, that he was anxious to drop the subject.

The game proceeded. Elfride played by rote; Stephen by thought. It was the cruellest thing to checkmate him after so much labour, she considered. What was she dishonest enough to do in her compassion? To let him checkmate her. A second game followed; and being herself absolutely indifferent as to the result (her playing was above the average among women, and she knew it), she allowed him to give checkmate again. A final game, in which she adopted the Muzio gambit as her opening, was terminated by Elfride's victory at the twelfth move.

Stephen looked up suspiciously. His heart was throbbing even more excitedly than was hers, which itself had quickened when she seriously set to work on this last occasion. Mr. Swancourt had left the room.

"You have been trifling with me till now!" he exclaimed, his face flushing. "You did not play your best in the first two games?"

Elfride's guilt showed in her face. Stephen became the picture of vexation and sadness, which, relishable for a moment, caused her the next instant to regret the mistake she had made.

"Mr. Smith, forgive me!" she said sweetly. "I see now, though I did not at first, that what I have done seems like contempt for your skill. But, indeed, I did not mean it in that sense. I could not, upon

my conscience, win a victory in those first and second games over one who fought at such a disadvantage and so manfully."

He drew a long breath, and murmured bitterly, "Ah, you are cleverer than I. You can do everything—I can do nothing! O Miss Swancourt!" he burst out wildly, his heart swelling in his throat, "I must tell you how I love you! All these months of my absence I have worshipped you."

He leapt from his seat like the impulsive lad that he was, slid round to her side, and almost before she suspected it his arm was round her waist, and the two sets of curls intermingled.

So entirely new was full-blown love to Elfride, that she trembled as much from the novelty of the emotion as from the emotion itself.

Then she suddenly withdrew herself and stood upright, vexed that she had submitted unresistingly even to his momentary pressure. She resolved to consider this demonstration as premature.

"You must not begin such things as those," she said with coquettish hauteur of a very transparent nature. "And—you must not do so again—and papa is coming."

"Let me kiss you—only a little one," he said with his usual timidity, and without reading the factitiousness of her manner.

"No; not one."

"Only on your cheek?"

"No."

"Forehead?"

"Certainly not."

"You care for somebody else, then? Ah, I thought so!"

"I am sure I do not."

"Nor for me either?"

"How can I tell?" she said simply, the simplicity lying merely in the broad outlines of her manner and speech. There were the semitone of voice and half-hidden expression of eyes which tell the initiated how very fragile is the ice of reserve at these times.

Footsteps were heard. Mr. Swancourt then entered the room, and their private colloquy ended.

The day after this partial revelation, Mr. Swancourt proposed a drive to Tidmouth Beach, a distance of three or four miles.

Half an hour before the time of departure a crash was heard in the back yard, and presently Worm came in, saying partly to the world in general, partly to himself, and slightly to his auditors:

"Ay, ay, sure! That frying of fish will be the end of William Worm. They be at it again this morning—same as ever—fizz, fizz, fizz!"

"Your head bad again, Worm?" said Mr. Swancourt. "What was that noise we heard in the yard?"

"Ay, sir, a weak wambling man am I; and the frying have been going on in my poor head all through the long night and this morning as usual; and I was so dazed wi' it that down fell a piece of leg-wood across the shaft of the pony-shay, and splintered it off. 'Ay,' says I, 'I feel it as if 'twas my own shay; and though I've done it, and parish

pay is my lot if I go from here, perhaps I am as independent as one here and there.' ”

“Dear me, the shaft of the carriage broken!” cried Elfride. She was disappointed: Stephen doubly so. The vicar showed more warmth of temper than the accident seemed to demand, much to Stephen’s uneasiness and rather to his surprise. He had not supposed so much latent sternness could co-exist with Mr. Swancourt’s frankness and good-nature.

“You shall not be disappointed,” said the vicar at length. “It is almost too long a distance for you to walk. Elfride can trot down on her pony, and you shall have my old nag, Smith.”

Elfride exclaimed triumphantly, “You have never seen me on horseback—Oh, you must!” She looked at Stephen and read his thoughts in his face. “Ah, you don’t ride, Mr. Smith?”

“I am sorry to say I don’t.”

“Fancy a gentleman not able to ride!” said she rather pertly.

The vicar came to his rescue. “That’s common enough; he has had other lessons to learn. Now, I recommend this plan: let Elfride ride on horseback, and you, Mr. Smith, walk beside her.”

The arrangement was welcomed with secret delight by Stephen. It seemed to combine in itself all the advantages of a long slow ramble with Elfride, without the contingent possibility of the enjoyment being spoilt by her becoming weary. The pony was saddled and brought round.

“Now, Mr. Smith,” said the lady imperatively, coming downstairs, and appearing in her riding-

habit, as she always did in a change of dress, like a new edition of a delightful volume, "you have a task to perform to-day. These earrings are my very favourite darling ones; but the worst of it is that they have such short hooks that they are liable to be dropped if I toss my head about much, and when I am riding I can't give my mind to them. It would be doing me knight service if you keep your eyes fixed upon them, and remember them every minute of the day, and tell me directly I drop one. They have had such hairbreadth escapes, haven't they, Unity?" she continued to the parlour-maid who was standing at the door.

"Yes, miss, that they have!" said Unity with round-eyed commiseration.

"Once 'twas in the lane that I found one of them," pursued Elfride reflectively.

"And then 'twas by the gate into Eighteen Acres," Unity chimed in.

"And then 'twas on the carpet in my own room," rejoined Elfride merrily.

"And then 'twas dangling on the embroidery of your petticoat, miss; and then 'twas down your back, miss, wasn't it? And oh, what a way you was in, miss, wasn't you? my! until you found it!"

Stephen took Elfride's slight foot upon his hand: "One, two, three, and up!" she said.

Unfortunately not so. He staggered and lifted, and the horse edged round; and Elfride was ultimately deposited upon the ground rather more forcibly than was pleasant. Smith looked all contrition.

"Never mind," said the vicar encouragingly;

"try again! 'Tis a little accomplishment that requires some practice, although it looks so easy. Stand closer to the horse's head, Mr. Smith."

"Indeed, I shan't let him try again," said she with a microscopic look of indignation. "Worm, come here, and help me to mount." Worm stepped forward, and she was in the saddle in a trice.

Then they moved on, going for some distance in silence, the hot air of the valley being occasionally brushed from their faces by a cool breeze, which wended its way along ravines leading up from the sea.

"I suppose," said Stephen, "that a man who can neither sit in a saddle himself nor help another person into one seems a useless encumbrance; but, Miss Swancourt, I'll learn to do it all for your sake; I will, indeed."

"What is so unusual in you," she said, in a didactic tone justifiable in a horse-woman's address to a benighted walker, "is that your knowledge of certain things should be combined with your ignorance of certain other things."

Stephen lifted his eyes earnestly to hers.

"You know," he said, "it is simply because there are so many other things to be learnt in this wide world that I didn't trouble about that particular bit of knowledge. I thought it would be useless to me; but I don't think so now. I will learn riding, and all connected with it, because then you would like me better. Do you like me much less for this?"

She looked sideways at him with critical meditation tenderly rendered.

"Do I seem like *La Belle Dame sans merci*?" she began suddenly, without replying to his question. "Fancy yourself saying, Mr. Smith:

'I sat her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A fairy's song.
She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew;'

and that's all she did."

"No, no," said the young man stilly, and with a rising colour.

" 'And sure in language strange she said,
I love thee true.' "

"Not at all," she rejoined quickly. "See how I can gallop. Now, Pansy, off!" And Elfride started; and Stephen beheld her light figure contracting to the dimensions of a bird as she sank into the distance—her hair flowing behind.

He walked on in the same direction, and for a considerable time could see no signs of her returning. Dull as a flower without the sun he sat down upon a stone, and not for fifteen minutes was any sound of horse or rider to be heard. Then Elfride and Pansy appeared on the hill in a round trot.

"Such a delightful scamper as we have had!" she said, her face flushed and her eyes sparkling. She turned the horse's head, Stephen arose, and they went on again.

"Well, what have you to say to me, Mr. Smith, after my long absence?"

"Do you remember a question you could not

exactly answer last night—whether I was more to you than anybody else?” said he.

“I cannot exactly answer now, either.”

“Why can’t you?”

“Because I don’t know if *I* am more to *you* than any one else.”

“Yes, indeed, you are!” he exclaimed in a voice of intensest appreciation, at the same time gliding round and looking into her face.

“Eyes in eyes,” he murmured playfully; and she blushingly obeyed, looking back into his.

“And why not lips on lips?” continued Stephen daringly.

“No, certainly not. Anybody might look; and it would be the death of me. You may kiss my hand if you like.”

He expressed by a look that to kiss a hand through a glove, and that a riding-glove, was not a great treat under the circumstances.

“There, then; I’ll take my glove off. Isn’t it a pretty white hand? Ah, you don’t want to kiss it, and you shall not now!”

“If I do not, may I never kiss again, you severe Elfride! You know I think more of you than I can tell; that you are my queen. I would die for you, Elfride!”

A rapid red again filled her cheeks, and she looked at him meditatively. What a proud moment it was for Elfride then! She was ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life.

Stephen stealthily pounced upon her hand.

"No; I won't, I won't," she said intractably; "and you shouldn't take me by surprise."

There ensued a mild form of tussle for absolute possession of the much-coveted hand, in which the boisterousness of boy and girl was far more prominent than the dignity of man and woman. Then Pansy became restless. Elfride recovered her position and remembered herself.

"You make me behave in not a nice way at all!" she exclaimed, in a tone neither of pleasure nor anger, but partaking of both. "I ought not to have allowed such a romp! We are too old now for that sort of thing."

"I hope you don't think me too—too much of a creeping-round sort of man," said he in a penitent tone, conscious that he too had lost a little dignity by the proceeding.

"You are too familiar; and I can't have it! Considering the shortness of the time we have known each other, Mr. Smith, you take too much upon you. You think I am a country girl, and it doesn't matter how you behave to me!"

"I assure you, Miss Swancourt, that I had no idea of freak in my mind. I wanted to imprint a sweet serious kiss upon your hand; and that's all."

"Now, that's creeping round again! And you mustn't look into my eyes so," she said shaking her head at him, and trotting on a few paces in advance. Thus she led the way out of the lane and across some fields in the direction of the cliffs. At the boundary of the fields nearest the sea she expressed a wish to dismount. The horse was tied

to a post, and they both followed an irregular path, which ultimately terminated upon a flat ledge passing round the face of the huge blue-black rock at a height about midway between the sea and the topmost verge. There, far beneath and before them, lay the everlasting stretch of ocean; there, upon detached rocks, were the white screaming gulls, seeming ever intending to settle, and yet always passing on. Right and left ranked the toothed and zigzag line of storm-torn heights, forming the series which culminated in the one beneath their feet.

Behind the youth and maiden was a tempting alcove and seat, formed naturally in the solid beetling mass, and wide enough to admit two or three persons. Elfride sat down, and Stephen sat beside her.

"I am afraid it is hardly proper of us to be here, either," she said half inquiringly. "We have not known each other long enough for this kind of thing, have we?"

"Oh yes," he replied judicially; "quite long enough."

"How do you know?"

"It is not length of time, but the manner in which our minutes beat, that makes enough or not enough in our acquaintanceship."

"Yes, I see that. But I wish papa suspected or knew what a *very new thing* I am doing. He does not think of it at all."

"Darling Elfie, I wish we could be married! It is wrong for me to say it—I know it is—before you

know more; but I wish we might be, all the same. Do you love me deeply, deeply?"

"No," she said in a fluster.

At this point-blank denial, Stephen turned his face away decisively, and preserved an ominous silence; the only objects of interest on earth for him being apparently the three or four-score sea-birds circling in the air afar off.

"I didn't mean to stop you quite," she faltered with some alarm; and seeing that he still remained silent, she added more anxiously, "If you say that again, perhaps, I will not be quite—quite so obstinate—if—if you don't like me to be."

"Oh, my Elfride!" he exclaimed, and kissed her.

It was Elfride's first kiss. And so awkward and unused was she; full of striving—no relenting. None of those apparent struggles to get out of the trap which only results in getting farther in. No final attitude of receptivity. No easy close of shoulder to shoulder, hand upon hand, face upon face, and, in spite of coyness, the lips in the right place at the supreme moment. That graceful though apparently accidental falling into position, which many have noticed as precipitating the end and making sweethearts the sweeter, was not here. Why? Because experience was absent. A woman must have had many kisses before she kisses well.

In fact, the art of tendering the lips for these amatory salutes based upon principles the same with those laid down in treatises on legerdemain for performing the trick called Forcing a Card. The

card is to be shifted nimbly, withdrawn, edged under, and withal not to be offered till the moment the unsuspecting person's hand reaches the pack; this forcing forward to be done so modestly and yet so coaxingly, that the person trifled with imagines he is really choosing what is in fact thrust into his hand.

Well there were none of these facilities now: and Stephen was conscious of it—first with a momentary regret that his kiss should be spoilt by her confused manner of receiving it, and then with the pleasant perception that her awkwardness was her charm.

“And you do care for me and love me?” said he.

“Yes.”

“Very much?”

“Yes.”

“And I mustn't ask you if you'll wait for me, and be my wife some day?”

“Why not?” she said naïvely.

“There is a reason why, my Elfride.”

“Not any one that I know of.”

“Suppose there is something connected with me which makes it almost impossible for you to agree to be my wife, or for your father to countenance such an idea?”

“Nothing shall make me cease to love you: no blemish can be found upon your personal nature. That is pure and generous, I know; and having that, how can I be cold to you?”

“And shall nothing else affect us—shall nothing

beyond my nature be a part of my quality in your eyes, Elfie?"

"Nothing whatever," she said with a breath of relief. "Is that all? Some outside circumstance? What do I care?"

"You can hardly judge, dear, till you know what has to be judged. For that, we will stop till we get home. I believe in you, but I cannot feel bright."

"Love is new, and fresh to us as the dew; and we are together. As the lover's world goes, this is a great deal. Stephen, I fancy I see the difference between me and you—between men and women generally, perhaps. I am content to build happiness on any accidental basis that may lie near at hand; you are for making a world to suit your happiness."

"Elfride, you sometimes say things which make you seem suddenly to become five years older than you are, or than I am; and that remark is one. I couldn't think so *old* as that, try how I might. . . . And no lover has ever kissed you before?"

"Never."

"I knew that; you were so unused. You ride well, but you don't kiss nicely at all; and I was told once, by my friend Knight, that that is an excellent fault in woman."

"Now, come; I must mount again, or we shall not be home by dinner-time." And they returned to where Pansy stood tethered. "Instead of entrusting my weight to a young man's unstable palm," she continued gaily, "I prefer a surer 'upping-stock'

(as the villagers call it), in the form of a gate. There—now I am myself again.”

They proceeded homeward at the same walking pace.

Her blitheness won Stephen out of his thoughtfulness, and each forgot everything but the tone of the moment.

“Mr. Smith, what did you love me for?” she said, after a long musing look at a flying bird.

“I don’t know,” he replied idly.

“Oh yes, you do,” insisted Elfride.

“Perhaps, for your eyes.”

“What of them?—now, don’t vex me by a light answer. What of my eyes?”

“Oh, nothing to be mentioned. They are indifferently good.”

“Come, Stephen, I won’t have that. What did you love me for?”

“It might have been for your mouth.”

“Well, what about my mouth?”

“I thought it was a passable mouth enough”——

“That’s not very comforting.”

“With a pretty pout and sweet lips; but actually, nothing more than what everybody has.”

“Don’t make up things out of your head as you go on, there’s a dear Stephen. Now—what—did—you—love—me—for?”

“Perhaps, ’twas for your neck and hair; though I am not sure: or for your idle blood, that did nothing but wander away from your cheeks and back again; but I am not sure. Or your hands and arms, that they eclipsed all other hands and arms;

or your feet, that they played about under your dress like little mice; or your tongue, that it was of a dear delicate tone. But I am not altogether sure."

"Ah, that's pretty to say; but I don't care for your love, if it made a mere flat picture of me in that way, and not being sure, and such cold reasoning; but what you *felt* I was, you know, Stephen" (at this a stealthy laugh and frisky look into his face), "when you said to yourself, 'I'll certainly love that young lady.'"

"I never said it."

"When you said to yourself, then, 'I never will love that young lady.'"

"I didn't say that, either."

"Then was it, 'I suppose I must love that young lady?'"

"No."

"What, then?"

"'Twas much more fluctuating—not so definite."

"Tell me; do, do."

"It was that I ought not to think about you if I loved you truly."

"Ah, that I don't understand. There's no getting it out of you. And I'll not ask you ever any more—never more—to say out of the deep reality of your heart what you loved me for."

"Sweet tantaliser, what's the use? It comes to this sole simple thing: That at one time I had never seen you, and I didn't love you; that then I saw you, and I did love you. Is that enough?"

"Yes; I will make it do. . . . I know, I think,

what I love you for. You are nice-looking, of course; but I didn't mean for that. It is because you are so docile and gentle."

"Those are not quite the correct qualities for a man to be loved for," said Stephen in rather a dissatisfied tone of self-criticism. "Well, never mind. I must ask your father to allow us to be engaged directly we get indoors. It will be for a long time."

"I like it the better. . . . Stephen, don't mention it till to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Because, if he should object—I don't think he will; but if he should—we shall have a day longer of happiness from our ignorance. . . . Well, what are you thinking of so deeply?"

"I was thinking how my dear friend Knight would enjoy this scene. I wish he could come here."

"You seem very much engrossed with him," she answered, with a jealous little toss. "He must be an interesting man to take up so much of your attention."

"Interesting!" said Stephen, his face glowing with his fervour; "noble, you ought to say."

"Oh yes, yes; I forgot," she said half satirically. "The noblest man in England, as you told us last night."

"He is a fine fellow, laugh as you will, Miss Elfie."

"I know he is your hero. But what does he do? anything?"

"He writes."

"What does he write? I have never heard of his name."

"Because his personality, and that of several others like him, is absorbed into a huge WE, namely, the impalpable entity called the PRESENT—a social and literary Review."

"Is he only a reviewer?"

"*Only*, Elfie! Why, I can tell you it is a fine thing to be on the staff of the *Present*. Finer than being a novelist considerably."

"That's a hit at me, and my poor *Court of Kellyon Castle*."

"No, Elfride," he whispered; "I didn't mean that. I mean that he is really a literary man of some eminence, and not altogether a reviewer. He writes things of a higher class than reviews, though he reviews a book occasionally. His ordinary productions are social and ethical essays—all that the *Present* contains which is not literary reviewing."

"I admit he must be talented if he writes for the *Present*. We have it sent to us irregularly. I want papa to be a subscriber, but he's so conservative. Now the next point in this Mr. Knight—I suppose he is a very good man."

"An excellent man. I shall try to be his intimate friend some day."

"But aren't you now?"

"No; not so much as that," replied Stephen as if such a supposition were extravagant. "You see, it was in this way—he came originally from the same place as I, and taught me things; but I am not intimate with him. Shan't I be glad when I get richer and better educated, and hob and nob with him!" Stephen's eyes sparkled.

A pout began to shape itself upon Elfride's soft lips. "You think always of him, and like him better than you do me."

"No, indeed, Elfride. The feeling is different quite. But I do like him, and he deserves even more affection from me than I give."

"You are not nice now, and you make me as jealous as possible!" she exclaimed perversely. "I know you will never speak to any third person of me so warmly as you do to me of him."

"But you don't understand, Elfride," he said with an anxious movement. "You shall know him some day. He is so brilliant—no, it isn't exactly brilliant; so thoughtful—nor does thoughtful express him—that it would charm you to talk to him. He's a most desirable friend, and that isn't half I could say."

"I don't care how good he is; I don't want to know him, because he comes between me and you. You think of him night and day, ever so much more than of anybody else; and when you are thinking of him, I am shut out of your mind."

"No, dear Elfride; I love you dearly."

"And I don't like you to tell me so warmly about him when you are in the middle of loving me. Stephen, suppose that I and this man Knight of yours were both drowning, and you could only save one of us—"

"Yes—the stupid old proposition—which would I save?"

"Well, which? Not me."

"Both of you," he said pressing her pendent hand.

"No, that won't do; only one of us."

"I cannot say; I don't know. It is disagreeable—quite a horrid idea to have to handle."

"A-ha, I know. You would save him, and let me drown, drown, drown; and I don't care about your love."

She had endeavoured to give a playful tone to her words, but the latter speech was rather forced in its gaiety.

At this point in the discussion she trotted off to turn a corner which was avoided by the footpath, the road and the path reuniting at a point little farther on. On again making her appearance she continually managed to look in a direction away from him, and left him in the cool shade of her displeasure. Stephen was soon beaten at this game of indifference. He went round and entered the range of her vision.

"Are you offended, Elfie? Why don't you talk?"

"Save me, then, and let that Mr. Clever of yours drown. I hate him. Now, which would you?"

"Really, Elfride, you should not press such a hard question. It is ridiculous."

"Then I won't be alone with you any more. Unkind, to wound me so!" She laughed at her own absurdity, but persisted.

"Come, Elfie, let's make it up and be friends."

"Say you would save me, then, and let him drown."

"I would save you—and him too."

"And let him drown. Come, or you don't love me!" she teasingly went on.

"And let him drown," he ejaculated despairingly.

"There; now I am yours!" she said, and a woman's flush of triumph lit her eyes.

"Only one earring, miss, as I'm alive!" said Unity on their entering the hall.

With a face expressive of wretched misgiving, Elfride's hand flew like an arrow to her ear.

"There!" she exclaimed to Stephen, looking at him with eyes full of reproach.

"I quite forgot, indeed. If I had only remembered!" he answered with a conscience-stricken face.

She wheeled herself round, and turned into the shrubbery. Stephen followed.

"If you had told *me* to watch anything, Stephen, I should have religiously done it," she capriciously went on, as soon as she heard him behind her.

"Forgetting is forgivable."

"Well, you will find it, if you want me to respect you and be engaged to you when we have asked papa." She considered a moment, and added more seriously, "I know now where I dropped it, Stephen. It was on the cliff. I remember a faint sensation of some change about me, but I was too absent to think of it then. And that's where it is now, and you must go and look there."

"I'll go at once."

And he strode away up the valley, under a

broiling sun and amid the deathlike silence of early afternoon. He ascended, with giddy-paced haste, the windy range of rocks to where they had sat, felt and peered about the stones and crannies, but Elfride's stray jewel was nowhere to be seen. Next Stephen slowly retraced his steps, and, pausing at a cross-road to reflect a while, he left the plateau and struck downwards across some fields, in the direction of Endelstow House.

He walked along the path by the river without the slightest hesitation as to its bearing, apparently quite familiar with every inch of the ground. As the shadows began to lengthen and the sunlight to mellow, he passed through two wicket-gates, and drew near the outskirts of Endelstow Park. The river now ran along under the park fence, previous to entering the grove itself, a little farther on.

Here stood a cottage, between the fence and the stream, on a slightly elevated spot of ground, round which the river took a turn. The characteristic feature of this snug habitation was its one chimney in the gable end, its squareness of form disguised by a huge cloak of ivy, which had grown so luxuriantly and extended so far from its base, as to increase the apparent bulk of the chimney to the dimensions of a tower. Some little distance from the back of the house rose the park boundary, and over this were to be seen the sycamores of the grove making slow inclinations to the just-awakening air.

Stephen crossed the little wood bridge in front, went up to the cottage door, and opened it without knock or signal of any kind.

Exclamations of welcome burst from some person or persons when the door was thrust ajar, followed by the scrape of chairs on a stone floor, as if pushed back by their occupiers in rising from a table. The door was closed again, and nothing could now be heard from within, save a lively chatter and the rattle of plates.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALLEN-A-DALE IS NO BARON OR LORD.

THE mists were creeping out of pools and swamps for their pilgrimages of the night when Stephen came up to the front door of the vicarage. Elfride was standing on the step, illuminated by a lemon-hued expanse of western sky.

"You never have been all this time looking for that earring?" she said anxiously.

"Oh no; and I have not found it."

"Never mind. Though I am much vexed; they are my prettiest. But, Stephen, what ever have you been doing—where have you been? I have been so uneasy. I feared for you, knowing not an inch of the country. I thought, suppose he has fallen over the cliff! But now I am inclined to scold you for frightening me so."

"I must speak to your father now," he said rather abruptly; "I have so much to say to him—and to you, Elfride."

"Will what you have to say endanger this nice time of ours, and is it that same shadowy secret you allude to so frequently, and will it make me unhappy?"

"Possibly."

She breathed heavily, and looked around as if for a prompter.

"Put it off till to-morrow," she said.

He involuntarily sighed too.

"No; it must come to-night. Where is your father, Elfride?"

"Somewhere in the kitchen garden, I think," she replied. "That is his favourite evening retreat. I will leave you now. Say all that's to be said—do all there is to be done. Think of me waiting anxiously for the end." And she re-entered the house.

She waited in the drawing-room, watching the lights sink to shadows, the shadows sink to darkness, until her impatience to know what had occurred in the garden could no longer be controlled. She passed round the shrubbery, unlatched the garden door, and skimmed with her keen eyes the whole twilighted space that the four walls enclosed and sheltered: they were not there. She mounted a little ladder, which had been used for gathering fruit, and looked over the wall into the field. This field extended to the limits of the glebe, which was enclosed on that side by a privet-hedge. Under the hedge was Mr. Swancourt, walking up and down, and talking aloud—to himself, as it sounded at first. No: another voice shouted occasional replies; and this interlocutor seemed to be on the other side of the hedge. The voice, though soft in quality, was not Stephen's.

The second speaker must have been in the long-neglected garden of an old manor-house hard by, which, together with a small estate attached, had lately been purchased by a person named Troyton,

whom Elfride had never seen. Her father might have struck up an acquaintanceship with some member of that family through the privet-hedge, or a stranger to the neighbourhood might have wandered thither.

Well, there was no necessity for disturbing him. And it seemed that, after all, Stephen had not yet made his desired communication to her father. Again she went indoors, wondering where Stephen could be. For want of something better to do, she went upstairs to her own little room. Here she sat down at the open window, and, leaning with her elbow on the table and her cheek upon her hand, she fell into meditation.

It was a hot and still August night. Every disturbance of the silence which rose to the dignity of a noise could be heard for miles, and the merest sound for a long distance. So she remained, thinking of Stephen, and wishing he had not deprived her of his company to no purpose, as it appeared. How delicate and sensitive he was, she reflected; and yet he was man enough to have a private mystery, which considerably elevated him in her eyes. Thus, looking at things with an inward vision, she lost consciousness of the flight of time.

Strange conjunctions of circumstances, particularly those of a trivial everyday kind, are so frequent in an ordinary life, that we grow used to their unaccountableness, and forget the question whether the very long odds against such juxtaposition is not almost a disproof of it being a matter of chance at all. What occurred to Elfride at this

moment was a case in point. She was vividly imagining, for the twentieth time, the kiss of the morning, and putting her lips together in the position another such a one would demand, when she heard the identical operation completely performed on the lawn, immediately beneath her window.

A kiss—not of the quiet and stealthy kind, but decisive, loud, and smart.

Her face flushed, and she looked out, but to no purpose. The dark rim of the upland drew a keen sad line against the pale glow of the sky, unbroken except where a young cedar on the lawn, that had outgrown its fellow trees, shot its pointed head across the horizon, piercing the firmamental lustre like a sting.

It was just possible that, had any persons been standing on the grassy portions of the lawn, Elfride might have seen their dusky forms. But the shrubs, which once had merely dotted the glade, had now grown bushy and large, till they hid at least half the enclosure containing them. The kissing pair might have been behind some of these; at any rate, nobody was in sight.

Had no enigma ever been connected with her lover by his hints and absences, Elfride would never have thought of admitting into her mind a suspicion that he might be concerned in the foregoing enactment. But the reservations he at present insisted on, while they added to the mystery without which perhaps she would never have seriously loved him at all, were calculated to nourish doubts of all kinds,

and with a slow flush of jealousy she asked herself, might he not be the culprit?

Elfride glided downstairs on tiptoe, and out to the precise spot on which she had parted from Stephen to enable him to speak privately to her father. Thence she wandered into all the nooks around the place from which the sound seemed to proceed—among the huge Laurestines, about the tufts of pampas grasses, amid the variegated hollies, under the weeping wych-elm—nobody was there. Returning indoors she called "Unity."

"She is gone to her aunt's, to spend the evening," said Mr. Swancourt, thrusting his head out of his study door, and letting the light of his candles stream upon Elfride's face—less revealing than, as it seemed to herself, creating the blush of uneasy perplexity that was burning upon her cheek.

"I didn't know you were indoors, papa," she said with surprise. "Surely no light was shining from the window when I was on the lawn?" and she looked and saw that the shutters were still open.

"Oh yes, I am in," he said indifferently. "What did you want Unity for? I think she laid supper before she went out."

"Did she?—I have not been to see—I didn't want her for that."

Elfride scarcely knew, now that a definite reason was required what that reason was. Her mind for a moment strayed to another subject, unimportant as it seemed. The red ember of a match was lying inside the fender, which explained that why she had

seen no rays from the window was because the candles had only just been lighted.

"I'll come directly," said the vicar. "I thought you were out somewhere with Mr. Smith."

Even the inexperienced Elfride could not help thinking that her father must be wonderfully blind if he failed to perceive what was the nascent consequence of herself and Stephen being so unceremoniously left together; wonderfully careless, if he saw it and did not think about it; wonderfully good, if, as seemed to her by far the most probable supposition, he saw it and thought about it and approved of it. These reflections were cut short by the appearance of Stephen just outside the porch, silvered about the head and shoulders with touches of moonlight, that had begun to creep through the trees.

"Has your trouble anything to do with a kiss on the lawn?" she asked abruptly, almost passionately.

"Kiss on the lawn?"

"Yes," she said imperiously now.

"I didn't comprehend your meaning, nor do I now exactly. I certainly have kissed nobody on the lawn, if that is really what you want to know, Elfride."

"You know nothing about such a performance?"

"Nothing whatever. What makes you ask?"

"Don't press me to tell; it is nothing of importance. And, Stephen, you have not yet spoken to papa about our engagement?"

"No," he said regretfully, "I could not find him directly; and then I went on thinking so much of

what you said about objections, refusals—bitter words possibly—ending our happiness, that I resolved to put it off till to-morrow; that gives us one more day of delight—delight of a tremulous kind.”

“Yes; but it would be improper to be silent too long, I think,” she said in a delicate voice, which implied that her face had grown warm. “I want him to know we love, Stephen. Why did you adopt as your own my thought of delay?”

“I will explain; but I want to tell you of my secret first—to tell you now. It is two or three hours yet to bedtime. Let us walk up the hill to the church.”

Elfride passively assented, and they went from the lawn by a side wicket, and ascended into the open expanse of moonlight which streamed around the lonely edifice on the summit of the hill.

The door was locked. They turned from the porch, and walked hand in hand to find a resting-place in the churchyard. Stephen chose a flat tomb, showing itself to be newer and whiter than those around it, and sitting down himself, gently drew her hand towards him.

“No, not there,” she said.

“Why not here?”

“A mere fancy; but never mind.” And she sat down.

“Elfie, will you love me, in spite of everything that may be said against me?”

“O Stephen, what makes you repeat that so continually and so sadly? You know I will. Yes, in-

deed," she said, drawing closer, "whatever may be said of you—and nothing bad can be—I will cling to you just the same. Your ways shall be my ways until I die."

"Did you ever think what my parents might be, or what society I originally moved in?"

"No, not particularly. I have observed one or two little points in your manners which are rather quaint—no more. I suppose you have moved in the ordinary society of professional people."

"Supposing I have not—that none of my family have a profession except me?"

"I don't mind. What you are only concerns me."

"Where do you think I went to school—I mean, to what kind of school?"

"Dr. Somebody's academy," she said simply.

"No. To a dame school originally, then to a national school."

"Only to those! Well, I love you just as much, Stephen, dear Stephen," she murmured tenderly, "I do indeed. And why should you tell me these things so impressively? What do they matter to me?"

He held her closer and proceeded.

"What do you think my father is—does for his living, that is to say?"

"He practises some profession or calling, I suppose."

"No; he is a mason."

"A Freemason?"

"No; a cottager and journeyman mason."

Elfride said nothing at first. After a while she whispered:

"That is a strange idea to me. But never mind; what does it matter?"

"But aren't you angry with me for not telling you before?"

"No, not at all. Is your mother alive?"

"Yes."

"Is she a nice lady?"

"Very—the best mother in the world. She was a dairy-maid."

"O Stephen!" came from her in whispered exclamation.

"She continued to attend to a dairy long after my father married her," pursued Stephen without further hesitation. "And I remember very well how, when I was very young, I used to go to the milking, look on at the skimming, sleep through the churning, and make believe I helped her. Ah, that was a happy time enough!"

"No, never—not happy."

"Yes, it was."

"I don't see how happiness could be where the drudgery of dairy-work had to be done for a living—the hands red and chapped, and the shoes clogged. . . . Stephen, I do own that it seems odd to regard you in the light of—of—having been so rough in your youth, and done menial things of that kind." (Stephen withdrew an inch or two from her side.) "But I *do love you* just the same," she continued, getting close under his shoulder again, "and I don't care anything about the past; and I see that

you are all the worthier for having pushed on in the world in such a way."

"It is not my worthiness; it is Knight's, who pushed me."

"Ah, always he—always he!"

"Yes, and properly so. Now, Elfride, you see the reason of his teaching me by letter. I knew him years before he went to Oxford, but I had not got far enough in my reading for him to entertain the idea of helping me in classics till he left home. Then I was sent away from the village, and we very seldom met; but he kept up this system of tuition by correspondence with the greatest regularity. I will tell you all the story, but not now. There is nothing more to say now, beyond giving places, persons, and dates." His voice became timidly slow at this point.

"No; don't take trouble to say more. You are a dear honest fellow to say so much as you have; and it is not so dreadful either. It has become a normal thing that millionaires commence by going up to London with their tools at their back, and half-a-crown in their pockets. That sort of origin is getting so respected," she continued cheerfully, "that it is acquiring some of the odour of Norman ancestry."

"Ah, if I had *made* my fortune, I shouldn't mind. But I am only a possible maker of it as yet."

"It is quite enough. And so *this* is what your trouble was?"

"I thought I was doing wrong in letting you love me without telling you my story; and yet I feared to do

so, Elfie. I dreaded to lose you, and I was cowardly on that account."

"How plain everything about you seems after this explanation! Your peculiarities in chess-playing, the pronunciation papa noticed in your Latin, your odd mixture of book-knowledge with ignorance of ordinary social accomplishments, are accounted for in a moment. And has this anything to do with what I saw at Lord Luxellian's?"

"What did you see?"

"I saw the shadow of yourself putting a cloak round a lady. I was at the side door; you two were in a room with the window towards me. You came to me a moment later."

"She was my mother."

"Your mother *there!*" She withdrew herself to look at him silently in her interest.

"Elfride," said Stephen, "I was going to tell you the remainder to-morrow—I have been keeping it back—I must tell it now, after all. The remainder of my revelation refers to where my parents are. Where do you think they live? You know them—by sight at any rate."

"*I* know them!" she said in suspended amazement.

"Yes. My father is John Smith, Lord Luxellian's master-mason, who lives under the park wall by the river."

"O Stephen! can it be?"

"He built—or assisted at the building of the house you live in, years ago. He put up those stone gate piers at the lodge entrance to Lord Luxellian's

park. My grandfather planted the trees that belt in your lawn; my grandmother—who worked in the fields with him—held each tree upright whilst he filled in the earth: they told me so when I was a child. He was the sexton, too, and dug many of the graves around us.”

“And was your unaccountable vanishing on the first morning of your arrival, and again this afternoon, a run to see your father and mother? . . . I understand now; no wonder you seemed to know your way about the village!”

“No wonder. But remember, I have not lived here since I was nine years old. I then went to live with my uncle, a blacksmith, near Casterbridge, in order to be able to attend a national school as a day scholar; there was none in this remote part then. It was there I met with my friend Knight. And when I was fifteen and had been fairly educated by the schoolmaster—and more particularly by Knight—I was put as a pupil in an architect’s office in that town, because I was skilful in the use of the pencil. This was done by the efforts of my mother, rather against the wishes of Lord Luxellian, who likes my father, however, and thinks a great deal of him. There I stayed till six months ago, when I obtained a situation as improver, as it is called, in a London office. That’s all of me.”

“To think *you*, the London visitor, the town man, should have been born here, and have known this village so many years before I did. How strange—how very strange it seems to me!” she murmured.

“My mother curtseyed to you and your father

last Sunday," said Stephen with a pained smile at the thought of the incongruity. "And your papa said to her, 'I am glad to see you so regular at church, *Jane*.'"

"I remember it, but I have never spoken to her. We have only been here eighteen months, and the parish is so large."

"Contrast with this," said Stephen with a miserable laugh, "your father's belief in my 'blue blood,' which is still prevalent in his mind. The first night I came, he insisted upon proving my descent from one of the most ancient west-county families, on account of my second Christian name; when the truth is, it was given me because my grandfather was assistant gardener in the Fitzmaurice-Smith family for thirty years. Having seen your face, my darling, I had not heart to contradict him, and tell him what would have cut me off from a friendly knowledge of you."

She sighed deeply. "Yes, I see now how this inequality may be made to trouble us," she murmured, and continued in a low, sad whisper, "I wouldn't have minded if they had lived far away. Papa might have consented to an engagement between us if your connection had been with villagers a hundred miles off; remoteness softens family contrasts. But he will not like—O Stephen, Stephen! what can I do?"

"Do?" he said tentatively, yet with heaviness. "Give me up; let me go back to London, and think no more of me."

"No, no; I cannot give you up! This hopelessness in our affairs makes me care more for you. . . . I see what did not strike me at first. Stephen, why do we trouble? Why should papa object? An architect in London is an architect in London. Who inquires there? Nobody. We shall live there, shall we not? Why need we be so alarmed?"

"And, Elfie," said Stephen, his hopes kindling with hers, "Knight thinks nothing of my being only a cottager's son; he says I am as worthy of his friendship as if I were a lord's; and if I am worthy of his friendship, I am worthy of you, am I not, Elfride?"

"I not only have never loved anybody but you," she said, instead of giving an answer, "but I have not even formed a strong friendship, such as you have for Knight. I wish you hadn't. It diminishes me."

"Now, Elfride, you know better," he said wooingly. "And had you really never any sweetheart at all?"

"None that was ever recognised by me as such."

"But did nobody ever love you?"

"Yes—a man did once; very much, he said."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, a long time."

"How long, dearest."

"A twelvemonth."

"That's not *very* long" (rather disappointedly).

"I said long, not very long."

"And did he want to marry you?"

"I believe he did. But I didn't see anything in

him. He was not good enough, even if I had loved him."

"May I ask what he was?"

"A farmer."

"A farmer not good enough—how much better than my family!" Stephen murmured.

"Where is he now?" he continued to Elfride.

"*Here.*"

"Here! what do you mean by that?"

"I meant that he is here."

"Where here?"

"Under us. He is under this tomb. He is dead, and we are sitting on his grave."

"Elfie," said the young man, standing up and looking at the tomb, "how odd and sad that revelation seems! It quite depresses me for the moment."

"Stephen, I didn't wish to sit here; but you would do so."

"You never encouraged him?"

"Never by look, word, or sign," she said solemnly. "He died of consumption, and was buried the day you first came."

"Let us go away. I don't like standing by *him*, even if you never loved him. He was *before* me."

"Worries make you unreasonable," she half pouted, following Stephen at the distance of a few steps. "Perhaps I ought to have told you before we sat down. Yes; let us go."

CHAPTER IX.

HER FATHER DID FUME.

OPPRESSED, in spite of themselves, by a foresight of impending complications, Elfride and Stephen returned down the hill hand in hand. At the door they paused wistfully, like children late at school.

Women accept their destiny more readily than men. Elfride had now resigned herself to the overwhelming idea of her lover's sorry antecedents; Stephen had not forgotten the trifling grievance that Elfride had known earlier admiration than his own.

"What was that young man's name?" he inquired.

"Felix Jethway; a widow's only son."

"I remember the family."

"She hates me now. She says I killed him."

Stephen mused, and they entered the porch.

"Stephen, I only love you," she tremulously whispered.

He pressed her fingers, and the trifling shadow passed away, to admit again the mutual and more tangible trouble.

The study appeared to be the only room lighted up. They entered, each with a demeanour intended to conceal the inconcealable fact that reciprocal love was the dominant chord. Elfride perceived a man,

sitting with his back towards herself, talking to her father. She would have retired, but Mr. Swancourt had seen her.

"Come in," he said; "it is only Martin Cannister, come for a copy of the register for poor Mrs. Jethway."

Martin Cannister, the sexton, was rather a favourite with Elfride. He used to absorb her attention by telling her of his strange experiences in digging up after long years the bodies of persons he had known, and recognising them by some little sign (though in reality he had never recognised any). He had shrewd small eyes, and a great wealth of double chin, which compensated in some measure for considerable poverty of nose.

The appearance of a slip of paper in Cannister's hand, and a few shillings lying on the table in front of him, denoted that the business had been transacted, and the tenor of their conversation went to show that a summary of village news was now engaging the attention of parishioner and parson.

Mr. Cannister stood up and touched his forehead over his eye with his finger, in respectful salutation of Elfride, gave half as much salute to Stephen (whom he, in common with other villagers, had never for a moment recognised), then sat down again and resumed his discourse.

"Where had I got on to, sir?"

"To driving the pile," said Mr. Swancourt.

"The pile 'twas. So, as I was saying, Nat was driving the pile in this manner, as I might say." Here Mr. Cannister held his walking-stick scrupul-

ously vertical with his left hand, and struck a blow with great force on the knob of the stick with his right. "John was steadying the pile so, as I might say." Here he gave the stick a slight shake, and looked firmly in the various eyes around to see that before proceeding further his listeners well grasped the subject at that stage. "Well, when Nat had struck some half-dozen blows more upon the pile, 'a stopped for a second or two. John, thinking he had done striking, put his hand upon the top o' the pile to gie en a pull, and see if 'a were firm in the ground." Mr. Cannister spread his hand over the top of the stick, completely covering it with his palm. "Well, so to speak, Nat hadn't maned to stop striking, and when John had put his hand upon the pile, the beetle"—

"Oh, dreadful!" said Elfride.

"The beetle was already coming down, you see, sir. Nat just caught sight of his hand, but couldn't stop the blow in time. Down came the beetle upon poor John Smith's hand, and squashed en to a pummy."

"Dear me, dear me! poor fellow!" said the vicar with an intonation like the groans of the wounded in a pianoforte performance of the "Battle of Prague."

"John Smith the master-mason?" cried Stephen hurriedly.

"Ay, no other; and a better-hearted man God A'mighty never made."

"Is he so much hurt?"

"I have heard," said Mr. Swancourt, not noticing Stephen, "that he has a son in London—a very

promising young fellow—who has been helped forward a little by Lord Luxellian.”

“Oh, how he must be hurt!” repeated Stephen.

“A beetle couldn’t hurt very little. Well, sir, good-night t’ye; and ye, sir; and you, miss, I’m sure.”

Mr. Cannister had been making unnoticeable motions of withdrawal, and by the time this farewell remark came from his lips he was just outside the door of the room. He tramped along the hall, stayed more than a minute endeavouring to close the door properly, and then was lost to their hearing.

Stephen had meanwhile turned and said to the vicar:

“Please excuse me this evening! I must leave. John Smith is my father.”

The vicar did not comprehend at first.

“What did you say?” he inquired.

“John Smith is my father,” said Stephen deliberately.

A surplus tinge of redness rose from Mr. Swancourt’s neck, and came round over his face, the lines of his features became more firmly defined, and his lips seemed to get thinner. It was evident that a series of little circumstances, hitherto unheeded, were now fitting themselves together, and forming a lucid picture in Mr. Swancourt’s mind in such a manner as to render useless further explanation on Stephen’s part.

“Indeed,” the vicar said, in a voice dry and without inflection.

This being a word which depends entirely upon

its tone for its meaning, Mr. Swancourt's enunciation was equivalent to no expression at all.

"I have to go now," said Stephen, with an agitated bearing, and a movement as if he scarcely knew whether he ought to run off or stay longer. "On my return, sir, will you kindly grant me a few minutes' private conversation?"

"Certainly. Though antecedently it does not seem possible that there can be anything of the nature of private business between us."

Mr. Swancourt put on his straw hat, crossed the drawing-room, into which the moonlight was shining, and stepped out of the French window into the verandah. It required no further effort to perceive what, indeed, reasoning might have foretold as the natural colour of a mind whose pleasures were taken amid genealogies, good dinners, and patrician reminiscences, that Mr. Swancourt's prejudices were too strong for his generosity, and that Stephen's moments as his friend and equal were numbered, or had even now ceased.

Stephen moved forward as if he would follow the vicar, then as if he would not, and in absolute perplexity whither to turn himself, went awkwardly to the door. Elfride followed lingeringly behind him. Before he had receded two yards from the doorstep, Unity and Ann the housemaid came home from their visit to the village.

"Have you heard anything about John Smith? The accident is not so bad as was reported, is it?" said Elfride intuitively.

"Oh no; the doctor says it is only a bad bruise."

"I thought so!" cried Elfride gladly.

"He says that, although Nat believes he did not check the beetle as it came down, he must have done so without knowing it—checked it very considerably too; for the full blow would have knocked his hand abroad, and in reality it is only made black-and-blue like."

"How thankful I am!" said Stephen.

The perplexed Unity looked at him with her mouth rather than with her eyes.

"That will do, Unity," said Elfride magisterially; and the two maids passed on.

"Elfride, do you forgive me?" said Stephen with a faint smile. "No man is fair in love;" and he took her fingers lightly in his own.

With her head thrown sideways in the Greuze attitude, she looked a tender reproach at his doubt and pressed his hand. Stephen returned the pressure threefold, then hastily went off to his father's cottage by the wall of Endelstow Park.

"Elfride, what have you to say to this?" inquired her father, coming up immediately Stephen had retired.

With feminine quickness she grasped at any straw that would enable her to plead his cause. "He had told me of it," she faltered; "so that it is not a discovery in spite of him. He was just coming in to tell you."

"*Coming* to tell! Why hadn't he already told? I object as much, if not more, to his underhand concealment of this, than I do to the fact itself. It looks very much like his making a fool of me, and

of you too. You and he have been about together, and corresponding together in a way I don't at all approve of—in a most unseemly way. You should have known how improper such conduct is. A woman can't be too careful not to be seen alone with I-don't-know-who."

"You saw us, papa, and have never said a word."

"My fault, of course; my fault. What the deuce could I be thinking of! He, a villager's son; and we, Swancourts. We have been coming to nothing for centuries, and now I believe we have got there. What shall I next invite here, I wonder!"

Elfride began to cry at this very unpropitious aspect of affairs. "Oh papa, papa, forgive me and him. We care so much for one another, papa—oh, so much! And what he was going to ask you is, if you will allow of an engagement between us till he is a gentleman as good as you. We are not in a hurry, dear papa; we don't want in the least to marry now; not until he is richer. Only will you let us be engaged, because I love him so, and he loves me?"

Mr. Swancourt's feelings were a little touched by this appeal, and he was annoyed that such should be the case. "Certainly not!" he replied. He pronounced the inhibition lengthily and sonorously, so that the "not" sounded like "n-o-o-o-t!"

"No, no, no; don't say it!"

"Foh! A fine story. It is not enough that I have been deluded and disgraced by having him here,—the son of one of my village peasants,—but

now I am to make him my son-in-law! Heavens above us, are you mad, Elfride?"

"You have seen his letters come to me ever since his first visit, papa, and you knew they were a sort of—love-letters; and since he has been here you have let him be alone with me almost entirely; and you guessed, you must have guessed, what we were thinking of, and doing, and you didn't stop him. Next to love-making comes love-winning, and you knew it would come to that, papa."

The vicar parried this common-sense thrust. "I know—since you press me so—I know I did guess some childish attachment might arise between you; I own I did not take much trouble to prevent it; but I have not particularly countenanced it; and, Elfride, how can you expect that I should now? It is impossible; no father in England would hear of such a thing."

"But he is the same man, papa; the same in every particular; and how can he be less fit for me than he was before?"

"He appeared a young man with well-to-do friends, and a little property; but having neither, he is another man."

"You inquired nothing about him?"

"I went by Hewby's introduction. He should have told me. So should the young man himself; of course he should. I consider it a most dishonourable thing to come into a man's house like a treacherous I-don't-know-what."

"But he was afraid to tell you, and so should I have been. He loved me too well to like to run

the risk. And as to speaking of his friends on his first visit, I don't see why he should have done so at all. He came here on business: it was no affair of ours who his parents were. And then he knew that if he told you he would never be asked here, and would perhaps never see me again. And he wanted to see me. Who can blame him for trying, by any means, to stay near me—the girl he loves? All is fair in love. I have heard you say so yourself, papa; and you yourself would have done just as he has—so would any man.”

“And any man, on discovering what I have discovered, would also do as I do, and mend my mistake; that is, get shot of him again, as soon as the laws of hospitality will allow.” But Mr. Swancourt then remembered that he was a Christian. “I would not, for the world, seem to turn him out of doors,” he added; “but I think he will have the tact to see that he cannot stay long after this, with good taste.”

“He will, because he's a gentleman. See how graceful his manners are,” Elfride went on; though perhaps Stephen's manners, like the feats of Euryalus, owed their attractiveness in her eyes rather to the attractiveness of his person than to their own excellence.

“Ay; anybody can be what you call graceful, if he lives a little time in a city, and keeps his eyes open. And he might have picked up his gentlemanliness by going to the galleries of theatres, and watching stage drawing-room manners. He reminds me

of one of the worst stories I ever heard in my life."

"What story was that?"

"Oh no, thank you! I wouldn't tell you such an improper matter for the world!"

"If his father and mother had lived in the north or east of England," gallantly persisted Elfride, though her sobs began to interrupt her articulation, "anywhere but here—you—would have—only regarded—*him*, and not *them*. His station—would have—been what—his profession makes it,—and not fixed by—his father's humble position—at all; whom he never lives with—now. And it is clever and—honourable—of him, to be the best of his family."

"Yes. 'Let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess.'"

"You insult me, papa!" she burst out. "You do, you do! He is my own Stephen, he is!"

"That may or may not be true, Elfride," returned her father, again uncomfortably agitated in spite of himself. "You confuse future probabilities with present facts,—what the young man may be with what he is. We must look at what he is, not what an improbable degree of success in his profession may make him. The case is this: the son of a working-man in my parish—a youth who has not yet advanced so far into life as to have any income of his own deserving the name, and therefore of his father's degree as regards station—wants to be engaged to you. His family are living in precisely the same spot in England as yours, so through-

out this county—which is the world to us—you would always be known as the wife of Jack Smith the mason's son, and not under any circumstances as the wife of a London professional man. It is the drawback, not the compensating fact, that is talked of always. There, say no more. You may argue all night, and prove what you will; I'll stick to my words."

Elfride looked silently and hopelessly out of the window with large heavy eyes and wet cheeks.

"I call it great temerity—and long to call it audacity—in Hewby," resumed her father. "I never heard such a thing—giving such a hobbledehoy native of this place such an introduction to me as he did. Naturally you were deceived as well as I was. I don't blame you at all, so far." He went and searched for Mr. Hewby's original letter. "Here's what he said to me: 'Dear Sir,—Agreeably to your request of the 18th instant, I have arranged to survey and make drawings,' *et cætera*. 'My assistant, Mr. Stephen Smith'—assistant, you see, he called him, and naturally I understood him to mean a sort of partner. Why didn't he say 'clerk'?"

"They never call them clerks in that profession, because they do not write. Stephen—Mr. Smith—told me so. So that Mr. Hewby simply used the accepted word."

"Let me speak, please, Elfride! 'My assistant, Mr. Stephen Smith, will leave London by the early train to-morrow morning . . . *many thanks for your proposal to accommodate him . . . you may put every confidence in him*, and may rely upon his discern-

ment in the matter of church architecture.' Well, I repeat that Hewby ought to be ashamed of himself for making so much of a poor lad of that sort."

"Professional men in London," Elfride argued, "don't know anything about their clerks' fathers and mothers. They have assistants who come to their offices and shops for years, and hardly even know where they live. What they can do—what profits they can bring the firm—that's all London men care about. And that is helped in him by his faculty of being uniformly pleasant."

"Uniform pleasantness is rather a defect than a faculty. It shows that a man hasn't sense enough to know whom to despise."

"It shows that he acts by faith and not by sight, as those you claim succession from directed."

"That's some more of what he's been telling you, I suppose. Yes, I was inclined to suspect him, because he didn't care about sauces of any kind. I always did doubt a man's being a gentleman if his palate had no acquired tastes. An unedified palate is the irrepressible cloven foot of the upstart. The idea of my bringing out a bottle of my '40 Martinez—only eleven of them left now—to a man who didn't know it from eighteenpenny! Then the Latin line he gave to my quotation; it was very cut-and-dried, very; or I, who haven't looked into a classical author for the last eighteen years, shouldn't have remembered it. Well, Elfride, you had better go to your room; you'll get over this bit of tomfoolery in time."

"No, no, no, papa," she moaned. For all the

miseries attaching to miserable love, the worst is the misery of thinking that the passion which is the cause of them all may cease.

"Elfride," said her father with rough friendliness, "I have an excellent scheme on hand, which I cannot tell you of now. A scheme to benefit you and me. It has been thrust upon me for some little time—yes, thrust upon me—but I didn't dream of its value till this afternoon, when the revelation came. I should be most unwise to refuse to entertain it."

"I don't like that word," she returned wearily. "You have lost so much already by schemes. Is it those wretched mines again?"

"No; not a mining scheme."

"Railways?"

"Nor railways. It is like those mysterious offers we see advertised, by which any gentleman with no brains at all may make so much a week without risk, trouble, or soiling his fingers. However, I am intending to say nothing till it is settled, though I will just say this much, that you soon may have other fish to fry than to think of Stephen Smith. Remember, I wish, not to be angry, but friendly, to the young man; for your sake I'll regard him as a friend in a certain sense. But this is enough; in a few days you will be quite my way of thinking. There, now, go to your bedroom. Unity shall bring you up some supper. I wish you not to be here when he comes back."

CHAPTER X.

BENEATH THE SHELTER OF AN AGED TREE.

STEPHEN retraced his steps towards the cottage he had visited only two or three hours previously. He drew near and under the rich foliage growing about the outskirts of Endelstow Park, the spotty lights and shades from the shining moon maintaining a race over his head and down his back in an endless gambol. When he crossed the plank bridge and entered the garden-gate, he saw an illuminated figure coming from the enclosed plot towards the house on the other side. It was his father, with his hand in a sling, taking a general moonlight view of the garden, and particularly of a plot of the youngest of young turnips, previous to closing the cottage for the night.

He saluted his son with customary force. "Hallo, Stephen! We should ha' been in bed in another ten minutes. Come to see what's the matter wi' me, I suppose, my lad?"

The doctor had come and gone, and the hand had been pronounced as injured but slightly, though it might possibly have been considered a far more serious case if Mr. Smith had been a richer man. Stephen's anxious inquiry drew from his father words of regret at the inconvenience to the world of his

doing nothing for the next two days, rather than of concern for the pain of the accident. Together they entered the house.

John Smith—brown as autumn as to skin, white as winter as to clothes—was a satisfactory specimen of the village artificer in stone. In common with most rural mechanics, he had too much individuality to be a typical “working-man”—the resultant of that constant pebble-like attrition with his kind only to be experienced in large towns, which metamorphoses the unit Self into a fraction of the unit Class.

There was not the speciality in his labour which distinguishes the handicraftsmen of towns. Though only a mason, strictly speaking, he was not above handling a brick, if bricks were the order of the day; or a slate or tile, if a roof had to be covered before the wet weather set in, and nobody was near who could do it better. Indeed, on one or two occasions in the depth of winter, when frost peremptorily forbids all use of the trowel, making foundations to settle, stones to fly, and mortar to crumble, he had taken to felling and sawing trees. Moreover, he had practised gardening in his own plot for so many years that, on an emergency, he might have made a living by that calling.

Probably the countryman was not such an accomplished artificer in a particular direction as his town brethren in the trades. But he was, in truth, like that clumsy pin-maker who made the whole pin, and who was despised by Adam Smith on that ac-

count and respected by Macaulay, much more the artist nevertheless.

Appearing now, indoors, by the light of the candle, his stalwart healthiness was a sight so see. His beard was close and knotted as that of a chiselled Hercules; his shirt sleeves were partly rolled up, his waistcoat unbuttoned; the difference in hue between the snowy linen and the ruddy arms and face contrasting like the white of an egg and its yolk. Mrs. Smith, on hearing them enter, advanced from the pantry.

Mrs. Smith was a matron whose countenance addressed itself to the mind rather than to the eye, though not exclusively. She retained her personal freshness even now, in the prosy afternoon-time of her life; but what her features were primarily indicative of was a brisk common sense behind them; as a whole, appearing to carry with them a sort of argumentative commentary on the world in general.

The details of the accident were then rehearsed by Stephen's father, in the dramatic manner also common to Martin Cannister, other individuals of the neighbourhood, and the rural world generally. Mrs. Smith threw in her sentiments between the acts, as Coryphæus of the tragedy, to make the description complete. The story at last came to an end, as the longest will, and Stephen directed the conversation into another channel.

"Well mother, they know everything about me now," he said quietly.

"Well, done!" replied his father; "now my mind's at peace."

"I blame myself—I never shall forgive myself—for not telling them before," continued the young man.

Mrs. Smith at this point abstracted her mind from the former subject. "I don't see what you have to grieve about, Stephen," she said. "People who accidentally get thick don't, as a first heat, tell the history of their families."

"Ye've done no wrong, certainly," said his father.

"No; but I should have spoken sooner. There's more in this visit of mine than you think—a good deal more."

"Not more than *I* think," Mrs. Smith replied, looking triumphantly at him. Stephen blushed; and his father looked from one to the other in a state of utter incomprehension.

"She's a pretty piece enough," Mrs. Smith continued, "and very lady-like and clever too. But though she's very well fit for you as far as that is, why, mercy 'pon me, what ever do you want any woman at all for yet?"

John made his naturally short mouth a long one, and wrinkled his forehead. "That's the way the wind d'blow, is it?" he said.

"Mother," exclaimed Stephen, "how absurdly you speak! Criticising whether she's fit for me or no, as if there were room for doubt on the matter! Why, to marry her would be the great blessing of my life—socially and practically, as well as in other respects. No such good fortune as that, I'm afraid; she's too far above me. Her family doesn't want such country lads as I in it."

"Then if they don't want you, I'd see them dead corpses before I'd jine 'em, and go to better families who do want you."

"Ah, yes; but I could never put up with the distaste of being welcomed among such people as you mean, whilst I could get indifference among such people as hers."

"What crazy twist o' thinking woot come to next?" said his mother. "And come to that, she's not a bit too high for you, or you too low for her. See how careful I be to keep myself up. I'm sure I never stop for more than a minute together to talk to any journeyman's people; and I never invite anybody to our party o' Christmases who baint in business for themselves. And I talk to several top-permost carriage people that come to my lord's without saying mem or sir to 'em, and they take it as quiet as lambs."

"You curtseyed to the vicar, mother; and I wish you hadn't."

"But it was before he called me by my Christian name, or he would have got very little curtseying from me!" said Mrs. Smith, bridling and sparkling with vexation. "You go on at me, Stephen, as if I were your worst enemy! What else could I do wi' the man to get rid of him, banging it into me and your father by side and by seam, about what happened when he was a young feller at college, and I don't know what-all; the tongue o' en flopping round his mouth like a mop-rag round a dairy. That 'a did, didn't he, John?"

"That's about the size o't," replied her husband.

"Every woman now-a-days," resumed Mrs. Smith, "if she marry at all, must expect a father-in-law of a rank lower than her father. The men have gone up so, and the women have stood still. Every man you meet is more the dand than his father; and you are just level wi' her."

"That's what she thinks herself."

"It only shows her sense. I knew she was after ye, Stephen—I knew it."

"After me! Good Lord, what next!"

"And I really must say again that you ought not to be in such a hurry, and wait for a few years. You might go higher still then."

"The fact is, mother," said Stephen impatiently, "you don't know anything about it. I shall never go higher, because I don't want to, nor should I if I lived to be a hundred. As to you saying that she's after me, I don't like such a remark about her, for it implies a scheming woman, and a man worth scheming for, both of which are not only untrue, but ludicrously untrue, of this case. Isn't it so, father?"

"I'm afeared I don't understand the matter well enough to gie my opinion," said his father in the tone of the fox who had a cold and could not smell.

"She couldn't have been very backward anyhow, considering the short time you have known her," said his mother. "Well I think that five years hence you'll be plenty young enough to think of such things. And really she can very well afford to wait, and will too, take my word. Living down in an out-step

place like this, I am sure she ought to be very thankful that you took notice of her. She'd most likely have died an old maid if you hadn't turned up."

"All nonsense," said Stephen, but not aloud.

"A nice little thing she is," Mrs. Smith went on in a more complacent tone now that Stephen had been talked down; "there's not a word to say against her, I'll own. I see her sometimes decked out like a horse going to fair, and I admire her for't. A perfect little lady. But people can't help their thoughts, and if she'd learnt to make figures instead of letters when she was at school 'twould have been better for her pocket; for as I said, there never were worse times for such as she than now."

"Now, now, mother!" said Stephen with smiling deprecation.

"But I will!" said his mother with asperity. "I don't read the papers for nothing, and I know men all move up a stage by marriage. Men of her class, that is, parsons, marry squires' daughters; squires marry lords' daughters; lords marry dukes' daughters; dukes marry queen's daughters. All stages of gentlemen mate a stage higher; and the lowest stage of gentlewomen are left single, or marry out of their class."

"But you said just now, dear mother" —— retorted Stephen, unable to resist the temptation of showing his mother her inconsistency. Then he paused.

"Well, what did I say?" And Mrs. Smith prepared her lips for a new campaign.

Stephen, regretting that he had begun, since a volcano might be the consequence, was obliged to go on.

"You said I wasn't out of her class just before."

"Yes, there, there! That's you; that's my own flesh and blood. I'll warrant that you'll pick holes in everything your mother says, if you can, Stephen. You are just like your father for that; take anybody's part but mine. Whilst I am speaking and talking and trying and slaving away for your good, you are waiting to catch me out in that way. So you are in her class, but 'tis what *her* people would *call* marrying out of her class. Don't be so quarrelsome, Stephen!"

Stephen preserved a discreet silence, in which he was imitated by his father, and for several minutes nothing was heard but the ticking of the green-faced case-clock against the wall.

"I'm sure," added Mrs. Smith in a more philosophic tone, and as a terminative speech, "if there'd been so much trouble to get a husband in my time as there is in these days—when you must make a god-almighty of a man to get en to hae ye—I'd have eat dirt wi' a ladle before I'd ever have lowered my dignity to marry, or there's no bread in nine loaves."

The discussion now dropped, and as it was getting late, Stephen bade his parents farewell for the evening, his mother none the less warmly for their sparring; for although Mrs. Smith and Stephen were always contending, they were never at enmity.

"And possibly," said Stephen, "I may leave here

altogether to-morrow; I don't know. So that if I shouldn't call again before returning to London, don't be alarmed, will you?"

"But didn't you come for a fortnight?" said his mother. "And haven't you a month's holiday altogether? They are going to turn you out, then?"

"Not at all. I may stay longer; I may go. If I go, you had better say nothing about my having been here, for her sake. At what time of the morning does the carrier pass Endelstow lane?"

"Seven o'clock."

And then he left them. His thoughts were, that should the vicar permit him to become engaged, to hope for an engagement, or in any way to think of his beloved Elfride, he might stay longer. Should he be forbidden to think of any such thing, he resolved to go at once. And the latter, even to young hopefulness, seemed the more probable alternative.

Stephen walked back to the vicarage through the meadows, as he had come, surrounded by the soft musical purl of the water through little weirs, the modest light of the moon, the freshening smell of the dews outspread around. It was a time when mere seeing is meditation, and meditation peace. Stephen was hardly philosopher enough to avail himself of Nature's offer. His constitution was made up of very simple particulars; one which, rare in the spring-time of civilisations, seems to grow abundant as a nation gets older, individuality fades, and education spreads; that is, his brain had extraordinary receptive powers, and no great creativeness. Quickly acquiring any kind of knowledge he saw

around him, and having a plastic adaptability more common in woman than in man, he changed colour like a chameleon as the society he found himself in assumed a higher and more artificial tone. He had not many original ideas, and yet there was scarcely an idea to which, under proper training, he could not have added a respectable coordinate.

He saw nothing outside himself to-night; and what he saw within was a weariness to his flesh. Yet to a dispassionate observer, his pretensions to Elfride, though rather premature, were far from absurd as marriages go, unless the accidental proximity of poor but honest parents could be said to make them so.

The clock struck eleven when he entered the house. Elfride had been waiting with scarcely a movement since he departed. Before he had spoken to her she caught sight of him passing into the study with her father. She saw that he had by some means obtained the private interview he desired.

A nervous headache had been growing on the excitable girl during the absence of Stephen, and now she could do nothing beyond going up again to her room as she had done before. Instead of lying down she sat again in the darkness without closing the door, and listened with a beating heart to every sound from downstairs. The servants had gone to bed. She ultimately heard the two men come from the study and cross to the dining-room, where supper had been lingering for more than an hour. The door was left open, and she found that the meal, such as it was, passed off between her

father and her lover without any remark, save commonplaces as to cucumbers and melons, their wholesomeness and culture, uttered in a stiff and formal way. It seemed to prefigure failure.

Shortly afterwards Stephen came upstairs to his bedroom and was almost immediately followed by her father, who also retired for the night. Not inclined to get a light, she partly undressed and sat on the bed, where she remained in pained thought for some time, possibly an hour. Then rising to close her door previous to fully unrobing, she saw a streak of light shining across the landing. Her father's door was shut, and he could be heard snoring regularly. The light came from Stephen's room, and the slight sounds also coming thence emphatically denoted what he was doing. In the perfect silence she could hear the closing of a lid and the clicking of a lock,—he was fastening his hat-box. Then the buckling of straps and the click of another key,—he was securing his portmanteau. With trebled foreboding she opened her door softly, and went towards his. One sensation pervaded her to distraction. Stephen, her handsome youth and darling, was going away, and she might never see him again except in secret and in sadness—perhaps never more. At any rate, she could no longer wait till the morning to hear the result of the interview, as she had intended. She flung her dressing-gown round her, tapped lightly at his door, and whispered "Stephen!" He came instantly, opened the door, and stepped out.

"Tell me; are we to hope?"

He replied in a disturbed whisper, and a tear approached its outlet, though none fell.

"I am not to think of such a preposterous thing—that's what he said. And I am going to-morrow. I should have called you up to bid you good-bye."

"But he didn't say you were to go—O Stephen, he didn't say that?"

"No; not in words. But I cannot stay."

"Oh, don't, don't go! Do come and let us talk. Let us come down to the drawing-room for a few minutes; he will hear us here."

She preceded him down the staircase with the taper light in her hand, looking unnaturally tall and thin in the long dove-coloured dressing-gown she wore. She did not stop to think of the propriety or otherwise of this midnight interview under such circumstances. She thought that the tragedy of her life was beginning, and, for the first time almost, felt that her existence might have a grave side, the shade of which enveloped and rendered invisible the delicate gradation of custom and punctilio. Elfride softly opened the drawing-room door and they both went in. When she had placed the candle on the table, he enclosed her with his arms, dried her eyes with his handkerchief, and kissed their lids.

"Stephen, it is over—happy love is over; and there is no more sunshine now!"

"I will make a fortune, and come to you, and have you. Yes, I will."

"Papa will never hear of it—never, never! You don't know him. I do. He is either biassed in

favour of a thing, or prejudiced against it. Argument is powerless against either feeling."

"No; I won't think of him so," said Stephen. "If I appear before him some time hence as a man of established name, he will accept me—I know he will. He is not a wicked man."

"No, he is not wicked. But you say 'some time hence,' as if it were no time. To you, among bustle and excitement, it will be comparatively a short time, perhaps; oh, to me, it will be its real length trebled! Every summer will be a year—autumn a year—winter a year! O Stephen! and you may forget me!"

Forget: that was, and is, the real sting of waiting to mimosa-hearted woman. The remark awoke in Stephen the converse fear. "You, too, may be persuaded to give me up, when time has made me fainter in your memory. For, remember, your love for me must be nourished in secret; there will be no long visits from me to support you. Circumstances will always tend to obliterate me."

"Stephen," she said, filled with her own misgivings, and unheeding his last words, "there are beautiful women where you live—of course I know there are—and they may win you away from me." Her tears came visibly as she drew a mental picture of his faithlessness. "And it won't be your fault," she continued, looking into the candle with doleful eyes. "No. You will think that our family don't want you, and get to include me with them. And there will be a vacancy in your heart, and some others will be let in."

"I could not, I would not. Elfie, do not be so full of forebodings."

"Oh yes, they will," she replied. "And you will look at them, not caring at first, and then you will look and be interested, and after a while you will think, 'Ah, they know all about city life, and assemblies, and coteries, and the manners of the titled, and poor little Elfie, with all the fuss that's made about her having me, doesn't know about anything but a little house and a few cliffs and a space of sea, far away.' And then you'll be more interested in them, and they'll make you have them instead of me, on purpose to be cruel to me because I am silly, and they are clever and hate me. And I hate them, too; yes, I do!"

Her impulsive words had power to impress him at any rate with the recognition of the uncertainty of all that is not accomplished. And, worse than that general feeling, there of course remained the sadness which arose from the special features of his own case. However remote a desired issue may be, the mere fact of having entered the groove which leads to it, cheers to some extent with a sense of accomplishment. Had Mr. Swancourt consented to an engagement of no less length than ten years, Stephen would have been comparatively cheerful in waiting; they would have felt that they were somewhere on the road to Cupid's garden. But, with a possibility of a shorter probation, they had not as yet any prospect of the beginning; the zero of hope had yet to be reached. Mr. Swancourt would have to revoke his formidable words before the

waiting for marriage could even set in. And this was despair.

"I wish we could marry now," murmured Stephen, as an impossible fancy.

"So do I," said she also, as if regarding an idle dream. "'Tis the only thing that ever does sweet-hearts good."

"Secretly would do, would it not, Elfie?"

"Yes, secretly would do; secretly would indeed be best," she said, and went on reflectively: "All we want is to render it absolutely impossible for any future circumstance to upset our future intention of being happy together; not to begin being happy now."

"Exactly," he murmured in a voice and manner the counterpart of hers. "To marry and part secretly, and live on as we are living now; merely to put it out of anybody's power to force you away from me, dearest."

"Or you away from me, Stephen."

"Or me from you. It is possible to conceive a force of circumstance strong enough to make any woman in the world marry against her will: no conceivable pressure, up to torture or starvation, can make a woman once married to her lover anybody else's wife."

Now up to this point the idea of an immediate secret marriage had been held by both as an untenable hypothesis, wherewith simply to beguile a miserable moment. During a pause which followed Stephen's last remark, a fascinating perception, then an alluring conviction, flashed along the brain of

both. The perception was that an immediate marriage *could* be contrived; the conviction, that such an act, in spite of its daring, its fathomless results, its deceptiveness, would be preferred by each to the life they must lead under any other conditions.

The youth spoke first, and his voice trembled with the magnitude of the conception he was cherishing. "How strong we should feel, Elfride! going on our separate courses as before, without the fear of ultimate separation! O Elfride! think of it; think of it!"

It is certain that the young girl's love for Stephen received a fanning from her father's opposition which made it blaze with a dozen times the intensity it would have exhibited if left alone. Never were conditions more favourable for developing a girl's first passing fancy for a handsome boyish face—a fancy rooted in experience and nourished by seclusion—into a wild unreflecting passion fervid enough for anything. All the elements of such a development were there, the chief one being hopelessness—a necessary ingredient always to perfect the mixture of feelings united under the name of loving to distraction.

"We would tell papa soon, would we not?" she inquired timidly. "Nobody else need know. He would then be convinced that hearts cannot be played with; love encouraged be ready to grow, love discouraged be ready to die, at a moment's notice. Stephen, do you not think that if marriages against a parent's consent are ever justifiable, they are when young people have been favoured up to a

point, as we have, and then have had that favour suddenly withdrawn?"

"Yes. It is not as if we had from the beginning acted in opposition to your papa's wishes. Only think, Elfie, how pleasant he was towards me but six hours ago! He liked me, praised me, never objected to my being alone with you."

"I believe he *must* like you now," she cried. "And if he found that you irremediably belonged to me, he would own it and help you. O Stephen, Stephen," she burst out again, as the remembrance of his packing came afresh to her mind, "I cannot bear your going away like this! It is too dreadful. All I have been expecting miserably killed within me like this!"

Stephen flushed hot with impulse. "I will not be a doubt to you—thought of you shall not be a misery to me!" he said. "We will be wife and husband before we part for long!"

She hid her face on his shoulder. "Anything to make *sure!*" she whispered.

"I did not like to propose it immediately," continued Stephen. "It seemed to me—it seems to me now—like trying to catch you—a girl better in the world than I."

"Not that, indeed! And am I better in worldly station? What's the use of have beens? We may have been something once; we are nothing now."

Then they whispered long and earnestly together; Stephen hesitatingly proposing this and that plan, Elfride modifying them, with quick breathings, and hectic flush, and unnaturally bright eyes. It

was two o'clock before an arrangement was finally concluded.

She then told him to leave her, giving him his light to go up to his own room. They parted with an agreement not to meet again in the morning. After his door had been some time closed he heard her softly gliding into her chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS' MEETING.

STEPHEN lay watching the Great Bear; Elfride was regarding a monotonous parallelogram of window blind. Neither slept that night.

Early the next morning—that is to say, four hours after their stolen interview, and just as the earliest servant was heard moving about—Stephen Smith went downstairs, portmanteau in hand. Throughout the night he had intended to see Mr. Swancourt again, but the sharp rebuff of the previous evening rendered such an interview particularly distasteful. Perhaps there was another and less honest reason. He decided to put it off. Whatever of moral timidity or obliquity may have lain in such a decision, no perception of it was strong enough to detain him. He wrote a note in his room, which stated simply that he did not feel happy in the house after Mr. Swancourt's sudden veto on what he had favoured a few hours before; but that he hoped a time would come, and that soon, when his original feelings of pleasure as Mr. Swancourt's guest might be recovered.

He expected to find the downstairs rooms wearing the gray and cheerless aspect that early morning gives to everything out of the sun. He found in

the dining-room a breakfast laid, of which somebody had just partaken.

Stephen gave the maid-servant his note of adieu. She stated that Mr. Swancourt had risen early that morning, and made an early breakfast. He was not going away that she knew of.

Stephen partook of a cup of coffee, left the house of his love, and turned into the lane. It was so early that the shaded places still smelt like night time, and the sunny spots had hardly felt the sun. The horizontal rays made every shallow dip in the ground to show as a well-marked hollow. Even the channel of the path was enough to throw shade, and the very stones of the road cast tapering dashes of darkness westward, as long as Jael's tent-nail.

At a spot not more than a hundred yards from the vicar's residence, the lane leading thence crossed the high road. Stephen reached the point of intersection, stood still and listened. Nothing could be heard save the lengthy, murmuring line of the sea upon the adjacent shore. He looked at his watch, and then mounted a gate upon which he seated himself, to await the arrival of the carrier. Whilst he sat he heard wheels coming in two directions.

The vehicle approaching on his right he soon recognised as the carrier's. There were the accompanying sounds of the owner's voice and the smack of his whip, distinct in the still morning air, by which he encouraged his horses up the hill.

The other set of wheels sounded from the lane Stephen had just traversed. On closer observation, he perceived that they were moving from the pre-

cincts of the ancient manor-house adjoining the vicarage grounds. A carriage then left the entrance gates of the house, and wheeling round came fully in sight. It was a plain, travelling carriage, with a small quantity of luggage, apparently a lady's. The vehicle came to the junction of the four ways half-a minute before the carrier reached the same spot, and crossed directly in his front, proceeding by the lane on the other side.

Inside the carriage Stephen could just discern an elderly lady with a younger woman, who seemed to be her maid. The road they had taken led to Stratleigh, a small watering-place eighteen miles north.

He heard the manor-house gates swing again, and looking up saw another person leaving them, and walking off in the direction of the parsonage. "Ah, how much I wish I were moving that way!" felt he parenthetically. The gentleman was tall, and resembled Mr. Swancourt in outline and attire. He opened the vicarage gate and went in. Mr. Swancourt, then, it certainly was. Instead of remaining in bed that morning, Mr. Swancourt must have taken it into his head to see his new neighbour off on a journey. He must have been greatly interested in that neighbour to do such an unusual thing.

The carrier's conveyance had pulled up, and Stephen now handed in his portmanteau and mounted the shafts. "Who is that lady in the carriage?" he inquired indifferently of Lickpan the carrier.

"That, sir, is Mrs. Troyton, a widder wi' a mint

o' money. She's the owner of all that part of Endelstow that is not Lord Luxellian's. Only been here a short time, as the saying is; she came into it by law. The owner formerly was a terrible mysterious party—never lived here—hardly ever was seen here except in the month of September, as I might say."

The horses were started again, and noise rendered further discourse a matter of too great exertion. Stephen crept inside under the tilt, and was soon lost in reverie.

Three hours and a half of straining up hills and jogging down brought them to St. Kirrs, the market town and railway station nearest to Endelstow, and the place from which Stephen Smith had journeyed over the downs on the, to him, memorable winter evening at the beginning of the same year. The carrier's van was so timed as to meet a starting up-train, which Stephen entered. Two or three hours' railway travel through vertical cuttings in metamorphic rock, through oak copses rich and green, stretching over slopes and down delightful valleys, glens, and ravines, sparkling with water like many-rilled Ida, and he plunged amid the hundred and fifty thousand people composing the town of Plymouth.

There being some time upon his hands, he left his luggage at the cloak-room, and went on foot along Bedford Street to the nearest church. Here Stephen wandered among the multifarious tombstones and looked in at the chancel window, dreaming of something that was likely to transpire by the altar there in the course of the coming month. He turned

away and ascended the Hoe, viewed the magnificent stretch of sea and massive promontories of land, but without particularly discerning one feature of the varied perspective. He still saw that inner prospect—the event he hoped for in yonder church. The wide Sound, the Breakwater, the lighthouse on far-off Eddystone, the dark steam vessels, brigs, barques, and schooners, either floating stilly, or gliding with tiniest motion, were as the dream, then; the dreamed-of event was as the reality.

Soon Stephen went down from the Hoe, and returned to the railway station. He took his ticket, and entered the London train.

That day was an irksome time at Endelstow vicarage. Neither father nor daughter alluded to the departure of Stephen. Mr. Swancourt's manner towards her partook of the compunctious kindness that arises from a misgiving as to the justice of some previous act.

Either from lack of the capacity to grasp the whole *coup d'œil*, or from a natural endowment for certain kinds of stoicism, women are cooler than men in critical situations of the passive form. Probably, in Elfride's case at least, it was blindness to the greater contingencies of the future she was preparing for herself, which enabled her to ask her father in a quiet voice if he could give her a holiday soon, to ride to St. Kirrs and go on to Plymouth.

Now, she had only once before gone alone to Plymouth, and that was in consequence of some unavoidable difficulty. Being a country-girl, and a

good, not to say a wild, horsewoman, it had been her delight to canter, without the ghost of an attendant, over the twelve or fourteen miles of hard road intervening between their home and the station at St. Kirrs, put up the horse, and go on the remainder of the distance by train, returning in the same manner in the evening. It was then resolved that, though she had successfully accomplished this journey once, it was not to be repeated without some attendance.

But Elfride must not be confounded with ordinary young lady equestrians. The circumstances of her lonely and narrow life made it imperative that in trotting about the neighbourhood she must trot alone or else not at all. Usage soon rendered this perfectly natural to herself. Her father, who had had other experiences, did not much like the idea of a Swancourt, whose pedigree could be as distinctly traced as a thread in a skein of silk, scampering over the hills like a farmer's daughter, even though he could habitually neglect her. But what with his not being able to afford her a regular attendant, and his inveterate habit of letting anything be to save himself trouble, the circumstance grew customary. And so there arose a chronic notion in the villagers' minds that all ladies rode without an attendant, like Miss Swancourt, except a few who were sometimes visiting at Lord Luxellian's.

"I don't like your going to Plymouth alone, particularly going to St. Kirrs on horseback. Why not drive, and take the man?"

"It is not nice to be so overlooked." Worm's

company would not seriously have interfered with her plans, but it was her humour to go without him.

"When do you want to go?" said her father.

She only answered, "Soon."

"I will consider," he said.

Only a few days elapsed before she asked again. A letter had reached her from Stephen. It had been timed to come on that day by special arrangement between them. In it he named the earliest morning on which he could meet her at Plymouth. Her father had been on a journey to Stratleigh, and returned in unusual buoyancy of spirit. It was a good opportunity; and since the dismissal of Stephen, her father had been generally in a mood to make small concessions, that he might steer clear of large ones connected with that outcast lover of hers.

"Next Thursday week I am going from home in a different direction," said her father. "In fact, I shall leave home the night before. You might choose the same day, for they wish to take up the carpets, or some such thing, I think. As I said, I don't like you to be seen in a town on horseback alone; but go if you will."

Thursday week. Her father had named the very day that Stephen also had named that morning as the earliest on which it would be of any use to meet her; that was, about fifteen days from the day on which he had left Endelstow. Fifteen days—that fragment of duration which has acquired such an interesting individuality from its connection with the English marriage law.

She involuntarily looked at her father so strangely,

that on becoming conscious of the look she paled with embarrassment. Her father, too, looked confused. What was he thinking of?

There seemed to be a special facility offered her by a power external to herself in the circumstance that Mr. Swancourt had proposed to leave home the night previous to her wished-for day. Her father seldom took long journeys; seldom slept from home except perhaps on the night following a remote visitation. Well, she would not inquire too curiously into the reason of the opportunity, nor did he, as would have been natural, proceed to explain it of his own accord. In matters of fact there had hitherto been no reserve between them, though they were not usually confidential in its full sense. But the divergence of their emotions on Stephen's account had produced an estrangement which just at present went even to the extent of reticence on the most ordinary household topics.

Elfride was almost unconsciously relieved, persuading herself that her father's reserve on his business justified her in secrecy as regarded her own—a secrecy which was necessarily a foregone decision with her. So anxious is a young conscience to discover a palliative, that the *ex post facto* nature of a reason is of no account in excluding it.

The intervening fortnight was spent by her mostly in walking by herself among the shrubs and trees, indulging sometimes in sanguine anticipations; more, far more frequently in misgivings. All her flowers seemed dull of hue; her pets seemed to look wistfully into her eyes, as if they no longer stood in the

same friendly relation to her as formerly. She wore melancholy jewellery, gazed at sunsets, and talked to old men and women. It was the first time that she had had an inner and private world apart from the visible one about her. She wished that her father, instead of neglecting her even more than usual, would make some advance—just one word; she would then tell all, and risk Stephen's displeasure. Thus brought round to the youth again, she saw him in her fancy, standing, touching her, his eyes full of sad affection, hopelessly renouncing his attempt because she had renounced hers; and she could not recede.

On the Wednesday she was to receive another letter. She had resolved to let her father see the arrival of this one, be the consequences what they might: the dread of losing her lover by this deed of honesty prevented her acting upon the resolve. Five minutes before the postman's expected arrival, she slipped out, and down the lane to meet him. She met him immediately upon turning a sharp angle, which hid her from view in the direction of the vicarage. The man smilingly handed one missive, and was going on to hand another, a circular from some tradesman.

"No," she said; "take that on to the house."

"Why, miss, you are doing what your father has done for the last fortnight."

She did not comprehend.

"Why, come to this corner, and take a letter of me every morning, all writ in the same handwriting,

and letting any others for him go on to the house." And on the postman went.

No sooner had he turned the corner behind her back than she heard her father meet and address the man. She had saved her letter by two minutes. Her father audibly went through precisely the same performance as she had just been guilty of herself.

This stealthy conduct of his was, to say the least, peculiar.

Given an impulsive inconsequent girl, neglected as to her inner life by her only parent, and the following forces alive within her; to determine a resultant:

First love acted upon by a deadly fear of separation from its object.

Inexperience, guiding onward a frantic wish to prevent the above-named issue.

Misgivings as to propriety, met by hope of ultimate exoneration.

Indignation at parental inconsistency in first encouraging, then forbidding.

A chilling sense of disobedience, overpowered by a conscientious inability to brook a breaking of plighted faith with a man who, in essentials, had remained unaltered from the beginning.

A blessed hope that opposition would turn an erroneous judgment.

A bright faith that things would mend thereby, and wind up well.

Probably the result would, after all, have been

nil, had not the following few remarks been made one day at breakfast.

Her father was in his old hearty spirits. He smiled to himself at stories too bad to tell, and called Elfride a little scamp for surreptitiously preserving some blind kittens that ought to have been drowned. After this expression, she said to him suddenly:

"If Mr. Smith had been already in the family, you would not have been made wretched by discovering he had poor relations?"

"Do you mean in the family by marriage?" he replied inattentively, and continuing to peel his egg.

The accumulating scarlet told that was her meaning, as much as the affirmative reply.

"I should have put up with it, no doubt," Mr. Swancourt observed.

"So that you would not have been driven into hopeless melancholy, but have made the best of him?"

Elfride's erratic mind had from her youth upwards been constantly in the habit of perplexing her father by hypothetical questions, based on absurd conditions. The present seemed to be cast so precisely in the mould of previous ones that, not being given to syntheses of circumstances, he answered it with customary complacency.

"If he were allied to us irretrievably, of course I, or any sensible man, should accept conditions that could not be altered; certainly not be hopelessly melancholy about it. I don't believe anything in

the world would make me hopelessly melancholy. And don't let anything make you so, either."

"I won't, papa," she cried, with a serene brightness that pleased him.

Certainly Mr. Swancourt must have been far from thinking that the brightness came from an exhilarating intention to hold back no longer from the mad action she had planned.

In the evening he drove away towards Stratleigh, quite alone. It was an unusual course for him. At the door Elfride had been again almost impelled by her feelings to pour out all.

"Why are you going to Stratleigh, papa?" she said, and looked at him longingly.

"I will tell you to-morrow when I come back," he said merrily; "not before then, Elfride. "Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know, and so far will I trust thee, gentle Elfride."

She was repressed and hurt.

"I will tell you my errand to Plymouth, too, when I come back," she murmured.

He went away. His merriment made her intention seem the lighter, as his indifference made her more resolved to do as she liked.

It was a familiar September sunset, dark-blue fragments of cloud upon an orange-yellow sky. These sunsets used to tempt her to walk towards them, as any beautiful thing tempts a near approach. She went through the field to the privet hedge, clambered into the middle of it, and reclined upon the thick boughs. After looking westward for a considerable time, she blamed herself for not look-

ing eastward to where Stephen was, and turned round. Ultimately her eyes fell upon the ground.

A peculiarity was observable beneath her. A green field spread itself on each side of the hedge, one belonging to the glebe, the other a part of the land attached to the manor-house adjoining. On the vicarage side she saw a little footpath, the distinctive and altogether exceptional feature of which consisted in its being only about ten yards long, and terminating abruptly at each end.

A footpath, suddenly beginning and suddenly ending, coming from nowhere and leading nowhere, she had never seen before.

Yes, she had, on second thoughts. She had seen exactly such a path trodden in the front of barracks by the sentry.

And this recollection explained the origin of the path here. Her father had trodden it by pacing up and down, as she had once seen him doing.

Sitting on the hedge as she sat now, her eyes commanded a view of both sides of it. And a few minutes later, Elfride looked over to the manor side.

Here was another sentry path. It was like the first in length, and it began and ended exactly opposite the beginning and ending of its neighbour, but it was thinner, and less distinct.

Two reasons existed for the difference. This one might have been trodden by a similar weight of tread to the other, exercised a less number of times; or it might have been walked just as frequently, but by lighter feet.

Probably a gentleman from Scotland-yard, had he been passing at the time, might have considered the latter alternative as the more probable. Elfride thought otherwise, so far as she thought at all. But her own great To-Morrow was now imminent; all thoughts inspired by casual sights of the eye were only allowed to exercise themselves in inferior corners of her brain, previous to being banished altogether.

Elfride was at length compelled to reason practically upon her undertaking. All her definite perceptions thereon, when the emotion accompanying them was abstracted, amounted to no more than these:

"Say an hour and three-quarters to ride to St. Kirrs.

"Say half an hour at the Falcon to change my dress.

"Say two hours waiting for some train and getting to Plymouth.

"Say an hour to spare before twelve o'clock.

"Total time from leaving Endelstow till twelve o'clock, five hours.

"Therefore I shall have to start at seven."

No surprise or sense of unwontedness entered the minds of the servants at her early ride. The monotony of life we associate with people of small incomes in districts out of the sound of the railway whistle, has one exception, which puts into shade the experience of dwellers about the great centres of population—that is, in travelling. Every journey

there, is more or less an adventure; adventurous hours are necessarily chosen for the most commonplace outing. Miss Elfride had to leave early—that was all.

Elfride never went out on horseback but she brought home something—something found, or something bought. If she trotted to town or village, her burden was books. If to hills, woods, or the seashore, it was wonderful mosses, abnormal twigs, a handkerchief of wet shells or seaweed.

Once, on a muddy day, when Pansy was walking with her down the street of Stranton village, on a fair-day, a packet in front of her and a packet under her arm, an accident befell the packets, and they slipped down. On one side of her, three volumes of fiction lay kissing the mud; on the other numerous skeins of polychromatic wools lay absorbing it. Unpleasant females smiled through windows at the mishap, the men all looked round, and a boy, who was minding a gingerbread stall whilst the owner had gone to get drunk, laughed loudly. The blue eyes turned to sapphires, and the cheeks crimsoned with vexation.

After that misadventure she set her wits to work, and was ingenious enough to invent an arrangement of small straps about the saddle, by which a great deal could be safely carried thereon, in a small compass. Here she now spread out and fastened a plain dark walking-dress and a few other trifles of apparel. Worm opened the gate for her, and she vanished away.

One of the brightest mornings of late summer

shone upon her. The heather was at its purplest, the furze at its yellowest, the grasshoppers chirped loud enough for birds, the snakes hissed like little engines, and Elfride at first felt lively. Sitting at ease upon Pansy, in her orthodox riding-habit and nondescript hat, she looked what she felt. But the mercury of those days had a trick of falling unexpectedly. First, only for one minute in ten had she a sense of depression. Then a large cloud, that had been hanging in the north like a black fleece, came and placed itself between herself and the sun. It helped on what was already inevitable, and she sank into a uniformity of sadness.

She turned in the saddle and looked back. They were now on an open table-land, whose altitude still gave her a view of the sea by Endelstow. She looked longingly at that spot.

During this little revulsion of feeling, Pansy had been still advancing, and Elfride felt it would be absurd to turn her little mare's head the other way. "Still," she thought, "if I had a mamma at home I *would* go back!"

And making one of those stealthy movements by which women let their hearts juggle with their brains, she did put the horse's head about, as if unconsciously, and went at a hand-gallop towards home for more than a mile. By this time, from the inveterate habit of valuing what we have renounced directly the alternative is chosen, the thought of her forsaken Stephen recalled her, and she turned about, and cantered on to St. Kirrs again.

This miserable strife of thought now began to rage in all its wildness. Overwrought and trembling, she dropped the rein upon Pansy's shoulders, and vowed she would be led whither the horse would take her.

Pansy slackened her pace to a walk, and walked on with her agitated burden for three or four minutes. At the expiration of this time they had come to a little by-way on the right, leading down a slope to a pool of water. The pony stopped, looked towards the pool, and then advanced and stooped to drink.

Elfride looked at her watch and discovered that if she were going to reach St. Kirrs early enough to change her dress at the Falcon, and get a chance of some early train to Plymouth—there were only two available—it was necessary to proceed at once.

She was impatient. It seemed as if Pansy would never stop drinking; and the repose of the pool, the idle motions of the insects and flies upon it, the placid waving of the flags, the leaf-skeletons, like Genoese filigree, placidly sleeping at the bottom, by their contrast with her own turmoil made her impatience greater.

Pansy did turn at last, and went up the slope again to the high-road. The pony came upon it, and stood crosswise, looking up and down. Elfride's heart throbbed erratically, and she thought, "Horses, if left to themselves, make for where they are best fed. Pansy will go home."

Pansy turned and walked on towards St. Kirrs.

Pansy at home, during summer, had little but

grass to live on. After a run to St. Kirrs she always had a feed of corn to support her on the return journey. Therefore, being now more than half-way, she preferred St. Kirrs.

But Elfride did not remember this now. All she cared to recognise was a dreamy fancy that to-day's rash action was not her own. She was disabled by her moods, and it seemed indispensable to adhere to the programme. So strangely involved are motives that, more than by her promise to Stephen, more even than by her love, she was forced on by a sense of the necessity of keeping faith with herself, as promised in the inane vow of ten minutes ago.

She hesitated no longer. Pansy went, like the steed of Adonis, as if she told the steps. Presently the quaint gables and jumbled roofs of St. Kirrs were spread beneath her, and going down the hill she entered the courtyard of the Falcon. Mrs. Buckle, the landlady, came to the door to meet her.

The Swancourts were well known here. The transition from equestrian to the ordinary guise of railway travellers had been more than once performed by father and daughter in this establishment.

In less than a quarter of an hour Elfride emerged from the door in her walking dress, and went to the railway. She had not told Mrs. Buckle anything as to her intentions, and was supposed to have gone out shopping.

An hour and forty minutes later, and she was in Stephen's arms at the Plymouth station. Not

upon the platform—in the secret retreat of a deserted waiting-room.

Stephen's face boded ill. He was pale and despondent.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"We cannot be married here to-day, my Elfie! I ought to have known it and stayed here. In my ignorance I did not. I have the licence, but it can only be used in my parish in London. I only came down last night, as you know."

"What shall we do?" she said blankly.

"There's only one thing we can do, darling."

"What's that?"

"Go on to London by a train just starting, and be married there to-morrow."

"Passengers for the 11.5 up-train take their seats!" said a guard's voice on the platform.

"Will you go, Elfride?"

"I will."

In three minutes the train had moved off, bearing away with it Stephen and Elfride.

CHAPTER XII.

ADIEU! SHE CRIES, AND WAVED HER LILY HAND.

THE few tattered clouds of the morning enlarged and united, the sun withdrew behind them to emerge no more that day, and the evening drew to a close in drifts of rain. The water-drops beat like duck shot against the window of the railway-carriage containing Stephen and Elfride.

The journey from Plymouth to Paddington, by even the most headlong express, allows quite enough leisure for passion of any sort to cool. Elfride's excitement had passed off, and she sat in a kind of stupor during the latter half of the journey. She was aroused by the clanging of the maze of rails over which they went their way at the entrance to the station.

"Is this London?" she said.

"Yes, darling," said Stephen in a tone of assurance he was far from feeling. To him, no less than to her, the reality so greatly differed from the prefiguring.

She peered out as well as the window, beaded with drops, would allow her, and saw only the lamps, which had just been lit, blinking in the wet atmosphere, and rows of hideous zinc chimney-pipes in dim relief against the sky. She writhed uneasily,

as when a thought is swelling in the mind which must cause much pain at its deliverance in words. Elfride had known no more about the stings of evil report than the native wild-fowl knew of the effects of Crusoe's first shot. Now she saw a little further, and a little further still.

The train stopped. Stephen relinquished the soft hand he had held all the day, and proceeded to assist her on to the platform.

This act of alighting upon strange ground seemed all that was wanted to complete a resolution within her.

She looked at her betrothed with despairing eyes.

"O Stephen," she exclaimed, "I am so miserable! I must go home again—I must—I must! Forgive my wretched vacillation. I don't like it here—nor myself—nor you!"

Stephen looked bewildered, and did not speak.

"Will you allow me to go home?" she implored. "I won't trouble you to go with me. I will not be any weight upon you; only say you will agree to my returning; that you will not hate me for it, Stephen! It is better that I should return again; indeed it is, Stephen."

"But we can't return now," he said in a deprecatory tone.

"I must! I will!"

"How? When do you want to go?"

"Now. Can we go at once?"

The lad looked hopelessly along the platform.

"If you must go, and think it wrong to remain,

dearest," said he sadly, "you shall. You shall do whatever you like, my Elfride. But would you in reality rather go now than stay till to-morrow, and go as my wife?"

"Yes, yes—much—anything to go now. I must; I must!" she cried.

"We ought to have done one of two things," he answered gloomily. "Never to have started, or not to have returned without being married. I don't like to say it, Elfride—indeed I don't; but you must be told this, that going back unmarried may compromise your good name in the eyes of people who may hear of it."

"They will not; and I must go."

"O Elfride! I am to blame for bringing you away."

"Not at all. I am the elder."

"By a month; and what's that? But never mind that now." He looked around. "Is there a train for Plymouth to-night?" he inquired of a guard. The guard passed on and did not speak.

"Is there a train for Plymouth to-night?" said Elfride to another.

"Yes, miss; the 8.10—leaves in ten minutes. You have come to the wrong platform; it is the other side. Change at Bristol into the night mail. Down that staircase, and under the line."

They ran down the staircase—Elfride first—to the booking-office, and into a carriage with an official standing beside the door. "Show your tickets, please"—they are locked in—men about the platform accelerate their velocities till they fly up and

down like shuttles in a loom—a whistle—the waving of a flag—a human cry—a steam groan—and away they go to Plymouth again, just catching these words, as they glide off:

“Those two youngsters had a near run for it, and no mistake!”

Elfride found her breath.

“And have you come too, Stephen? Why did you?”

“I shall not leave you till I see you safe at St. Kirrs. Do not think worse of me than I am, Elfride.”

And then they rattled along through the night, back again by the way they had come. The weather cleared, and the stars shone in upon them. Their two or three fellow-passengers sat for most of the time with closed eyes. Stephen sometimes slept; Elfride alone was wakeful and palpitating hour after hour.

The day began to break, and revealed that they were by the sea. Red rocks overhung them, and, receding into distance, grew livid in the blue grey atmosphere. The sun rose, and sent penetrating shafts of light in upon their weary faces. Another hour, and the world began to be busy. They waited yet a little, and the train slackened its speed in view of the platform at St. Kirrs.

She shivered, and mused sadly.

“I did not see all the consequences,” she said. “Appearances are wofully against me. If anybody finds me out, I am, I suppose, disgraced.”

“Then appearances will speak falsely; and how can that matter, even if they do? I shall be your

husband sooner or later, for certain, and so prove your purity."

"Stephen, once in London I ought to have married you," she said firmly. "It was my only safe defence. I see more things now than I did yesterday. My only remaining chance is not to be discovered; and that we must fight for most desperately."

They stepped out. Elfride pulled a thick veil over her face.

A woman with red and scaly eyelids and glistening eyes was sitting on a bench just inside the office-door. She fixed her eyes upon Elfride with an expression whose force it was impossible to doubt, but the meaning of which was not clear; then upon the carriage they had left. She seemed to read a sinister story in the scene.

Elfride shrank back, and turned the other way.

"Who is that woman?" said Stephen. "She looked hard at you."

"Mrs. Jethway—a widow, and mother of that young man whose tomb we sat on the other night. Stephen, she is my enemy. Would that God had had mercy enough upon me to have hidden this from *her*!"

"Do not talk so hopelessly," he remonstrated. "I don't think she recognised us."

"I pray that she did not."

He put on a more vigorous mood.

"Now, we will go and get some breakfast."

"No, no!" she begged. "I cannot eat. I *must* get back to Endelstow."

Elfride was as if she had grown years older than Stephen now.

"But you have had nothing since last night but that cup of tea at Bristol."

"I can't eat, Stephen."

"Wine and biscuit?"

"No."

"Nor tea, nor coffee?"

"No."

"A glass of water?"

"No. I want something that makes people strong and energetic for the present, that borrows the strength of to-morrow for use to-day—leaving to-morrow without any at all for that matter; or even that would take all life away to-morrow, so long as it enabled me to get home again now. Brandy, that's what I want. That woman's eyes have eaten my heart away!"

"You are wild; and you grieve me, darling. Must it be brandy?"

"Yes, if you please."

"How much?"

"I don't know. I have never drunk more than a teaspoonful at once. All I know is that I want it. Don't get it at the Falcon."

He left her in the fields, and went to the nearest inn in that direction. Presently he returned with a small flask nearly full, and some slices of bread-and-butter, thin as wafers, in a paper-bag. Elfride took a sip or two.

"It goes into my eyes," she said wearily. "I can't take any more. Yes, I will; I will close my

eyes. Ah, it goes to them by an inside route. I don't want it; throw it away."

However, she could eat, and did eat. Her chief attention was concentrated upon how to get the horse from the Falcon stables without suspicion. Stephen was not allowed to accompany her into the town. She acted now upon conclusions reached without any aid from him: his power over her seemed to have departed.

"You had better not be seen with me, even here where I am so little known. We have begun stealthily as thieves, and we must end stealthily as thieves, at all hazards. Until papa has been told by me myself, a discovery would be terrible."

Walking and gloomily talking thus they waited till nearly nine o'clock, at which time Elfride thought she might call at the Falcon without creating much surprise. Behind the railway-station was the river, spanned by an old Tudor bridge, whence the road diverged in two directions, one skirting the suburbs of the town, and winding round again into the high-road to Endelstow. Beside this road Stephen sat, and awaited her return from the Falcon.

He sat as one sitting for a portrait, motionless, watching the chequered lights and shades on the tree-trunks, the children playing opposite the school previous to entering for the morning lesson, the reapers in a field afar off. The certainty of possession had not come, and there was nothing to mitigate the youth's gloom, that increased with the thought of the parting now so near.

At length she came trotting round to him, in

appearance much as on the romantic morning of their visit to the cliff, but shorn of the radiance which glistened about her then. However, her comparative immunity from further risk and trouble had considerably composed her. Elfride's capacity for being wounded was only surpassed by her capacity for healing, which rightly or wrongly is by some considered an index of transientness of feeling in general.

"Elfride, what did they say at the Falcon?"

"Nothing. Nobody seemed curious about me. They knew I went to Plymouth, and I have stayed there a night now and then with Miss Bicknell. I rather calculated upon that."

And now parting arose like a death to these children, for it was imperative that she should start at once. Stephen walked beside her for nearly a mile. During the walk he said sadly:

"Elfride, four-and-twenty hours have passed, and the thing is not done."

"But you have insured that it shall be done."

"How have I?"

"O Stephen, you ask how! Do you think I could marry another man on earth after having gone thus far with you? Have I not shown beyond possibility of doubt that I can be nobody else's? Have I not irretrievably committed myself?—pride has stood for nothing in the face of my great love. You misunderstood my turning back, and I cannot explain it. It was wrong to go with you at all; and though it would have been worse to go farther, it would have been better policy, perhaps. Be as-

sured of this, that whenever you have a home for me—however poor and humble—and come and claim me, I am ready.” She added bitterly, “When my father knows of this day’s work, he may be only too glad to let me go.”

“Perhaps he may, then, insist upon our marriage at once!” Stephen answered, seeing a ray of hope in the very focus of her remorse. “I hope he may, even if we had still to part till I am ready for you, as we intended.”

Elfride did not reply.

“You don’t seem the same woman, Elfie, that you were yesterday.”

“Nor am I. But good-bye. Go back now.” And she reined the horse for parting. “O Stephen,” she cried, “I feel so weak. I don’t know how to meet him. Cannot you, after all, come back with me?”

“Shall I come?”

Elfride paused to think.

“No; it will not do. It is my utter foolishness that makes me say such words. But he will send for you.”

“Say to him,” continued Stephen, “that we did this in the absolute despair of our minds. Tell him we don’t wish him to favour us—only to deal justly with us. If he says, marry now, so much the better. If not, say that all may be put right by his promise to allow me to have you when I am good enough for you—which may be soon. Say I have nothing to offer him in exchange for his treasure—the more sorry I; but all the love, and all the life, and all the labour of an honest man shall be yours. As

to when this had better be told, I leave you to judge."

His words made her cheerful enough to toy with her position.

"And if ill report should come, Stephen," she said smiling, "why, the orange-tree must save me, as it saved virgins in St. George's time from the poisonous breath of the dragon. There, forgive me for forwardness: I am going."

Then the boy and girl beguiled themselves with words of half-parting only.

"Own wifie, God bless you till we meet again!"

"Till we meet again, good-bye!"

And the pony went on, and she spoke to him no more. He saw her figure diminish and her blue veil grow gray—saw it with the agonising sensation of a slow death.

After thus parting from a man than whom she had known none greater as yet, Elfride rode rapidly onwards, a tear being occasionally shaken from her eyes into the road. What yesterday had seemed so desirable, so promising, even trifling, had now acquired the complexion of a tragedy.

She saw the rocks and sea in the neighbourhood of Endelstow, and heaved a sigh of relief.

When she passed a field behind the vicarage she heard the voices of Unity and William Worm. They were hanging a carpet upon a line. Unity was uttering a sentence that concluded with "when Miss Elfride comes."

"When d'ye expect her?"

"Not till evening now. She's safe enough at Miss Bicknell's, bless ye."

Elfride went round to the door. She did not knock or ring; and seeing nobody to take the horse, Elfride led her round to the yard, slipped off the bridle and saddle, drove her towards the paddock, and turned her in. Then Elfride crept indoors, and looked into all the ground-floor rooms. Her father was not there.

On the mantelpiece of the drawing-room stood a letter addressed to her in his handwriting. She took it and read it as she went upstairs to change her habit.

"STRATLEIGH, *Thursday*.

"DEAR ELFRIDE,—On second thoughts I will not return to-day, but only come as far as Wadcombe. I shall be at home by to-morrow afternoon, and bring a friend with me.—Yours, in haste,

"C. S."

After making a quick toilet she felt more revived, though still suffering from a headache. On going out of the door she met Unity at the top of the stair.

"O Miss Elfride! I said to myself 'tis her sperrit! We didn't dream o' you not coming home last night. You didn't say anything about staying."

"I intended to come home the same evening, but altered my plan. I wished I hadn't afterwards. Papa will be angry, I suppose?"

"Better not tell him, miss," said Unity.

"I do fear to," she murmured. "Unity, would you just begin telling him when he comes home?"

"What! and get you into trouble?"

"I deserve it."

"No, indeed, I won't," said Unity. "It is not such a mighty matter, Miss Elfride. I says to myself, master's taking a hollerday, and because he's not been kind lately to Miss Elfride, she——"

"Is imitating him. Well, do as you like. And will you now bring me some luncheon?"

After satisfying an appetite which the fresh marine air had given her in its victory over an agitated mind, she put on her hat and went to the garden and summerhouse. She sat down, and leant with her head in a corner. Here she fell asleep.

Half-awake, she hurriedly looked at the time. She had been there three hours. At the same moment she heard the outer gate swing together, and wheels sweep round the entrance; some prior noise from the same source having probably been the cause of her awaking. Next her father's voice was heard calling to Worm.

Elfride passed along a walk towards the house behind a belt of shrubs. She heard a tongue holding converse with her father, which was not that of either of the servants. Her father and the stranger were laughing together. Then there was a rustling of silk, and Mr. Swancourt and his companion, or companions, to all seeming, entered the door of the house, for nothing more of them was audible. Elfride had turned back to meditate on what friends these

could be, when she heard footsteps, and her father exclaiming behind her,

"O Elfride, here you are! I hope you got on well?"

Elfride's heart smote her, and she did not speak.

"Come back to the summerhouse a minute," continued Mr. Swancourt; "I have to tell you of that I promised to."

They entered the summerhouse, and stood leaning over the knotty woodwork of the balustrade.

"Now," said her father radiantly, "guess what I have to say." He seemed to be regarding his own existence so intently, that he took no interest in nor even saw the complexion of hers.

"I cannot, papa," she said sadly.

"Try, dear."

"I would rather not, indeed."

"You are tired. You look worn. The ride was too much for you. Well, this is what I went away for. I went to be married!"

"Married!" she faltered, and could hardly check an involuntary "So did I." A moment after and her resolve to confess perished like a bubble.

"Yes; to whom do you think? Mrs. Troyton, the new owner of the estate over the hedge, and of the old manor-house. It was only finally settled between us when I went to Stratleigh a few days ago." He lowered his voice to a sly tone of merri-ment. "Now, as to your stepmother, you'll find she is not much to look at, though a good deal to listen to. She is twenty years older than myself, for one thing."

"You forget that I know her. She called here once, after we had been, and found her away from home."

"Of course, of course. Well, whatever her looks are, she's as excellent a woman as ever breathed. She has had lately left her as absolute property three thousand five hundred a year, besides the devise of this estate—and, by the way, a large legacy came to her in satisfaction of dower, as it is called."

"Three thousand five hundred a year!"

"And a large—well, a fair-sized—mansion in town, and a pedigree as long as my walking-stick; though that bears evidence of being rather a raked-up affair—done since the family got rich—people do those things now as they build ruins on maiden estates and cast antiques at Birmingham."

Elfride merely listened and said nothing.

He continued more quietly and impressively. "Yes, Elfride, she is wealthy in comparison with us, though with few connections. However, she will introduce you to the world a little. We are going to exchange the house in Baker Street for one at South Kensington, for your sake. Everybody is going there now, she says. At Easter we shall fly to town for the usual three months—I shall have a curate of course by that time. Elfride, I am past love, you know, and I honestly confess that I married her for your sake. Why a woman of her standing should have thrown herself away upon me, God knows. But I suppose her age and plainness were too pronounced for a town man. With your

good looks, if you now play your cards well, you may marry anybody. Of course, a little contrivance will be necessary; but there's nothing to stand between you and a husband with a title, that I can see. Lady Luxellian was only a squire's daughter. Now, don't you see how foolish the old fancy was? But come, she is indoors waiting to see you. It is as good as a play, too," continued the vicar, as they walked towards the house. "I courted her through the privet-hedge yonder: not entirely, you know, but we used to walk there of an evening—nearly every evening at last. But I needn't tell you details now; everything was terribly matter-of-fact, I assure you. At last, that day I saw her at Stratleigh, we determined to settle it off-hand."

"And you never said a word to me," replied Elfride, not reproachfully either in tone or thought. Indeed, her feeling was the very reverse of reproachful. She felt relieved and even thankful. Where confidence had not been given, how could confidence be expected?

Her father mistook her dispassionateness for a veil of politeness over a sense of ill-usage. "I am not altogether to blame," he said. "There were two or three reasons for secrecy. One was the recent death of her relative the testator, though that did not apply to you. But remember, Elfride," he continued in a stiffer tone, "you had mixed yourself up so foolishly with those low people, the Smiths—and it was just, too, when Mrs. Troyton and myself were beginning to understand each other—that I resolved to say nothing even to you. How did I know

how far you had gone with them and their son? You might have made a point of taking tea with them every day, for all that I knew."

Elfride swallowed her feelings as she best could, and languidly though flatly asked a question.

"Did you kiss Mrs. Troyton on the lawn about three weeks ago? That evening I came into the study and found you had just had candles in?"

Mr. Swancourt looked rather red and abashed, as middle-aged lovers are apt to do when caught in the tricks of younger ones.

"Well, yes; I think I did," he stammered; "just to please her, you know." And then recovering himself he laughed heartily.

"And was this what your Horatian quotation referred to?"

"It was, Elfride."

They stepped into the drawing-room from the verandah. At that moment Mrs. Swancourt came downstairs, and entered the same room by the door.

"Here, Charlotte, is my little Elfride," said Mr. Swancourt, with the increased affection of tone often adopted towards relations when newly produced.

Poor Elfride, not knowing what to do, did nothing at all; but stood receptive of all that came to her by sight, hearing, and touch.

Mrs. Swancourt moved forward, took her step-daughter's hand, then kissed her.

"Ah, darling!" she exclaimed good humouredly, "you didn't think when you showed a strange old woman over the conservatory a month or two ago, and explained the flowers to her so prettily, that she

would so soon be here in new colours. Nor did she, I am sure."

The new mother had been truthfully enough described by Mr. Swancourt. She was not physically attractive. She was dark—very dark—in complexion, portly in figure, and with a plentiful residuum of hair in the proportion of half a dozen white ones to half a dozen black ones, though the latter were black indeed. No further observed, she was not a woman to like. But there was more to see. To the most superficial critic it was apparent that she made no attempt to disguise her age. She looked sixty at the first glance, and close acquaintanceship never proved her older.

Another and still more winning trait was one attaching to the corners of her mouth. Before she made a remark these often twitched gently: not backwards and forwards, the index of nervousness; not down upon the jaw, the sign of determination; but palpably upwards, in precisely the curve adopted to represent mirth in the broad caricatures of school-boys. Only this element in her face was expressive of anything within the woman, but it was unmistakable. It expressed humour subjective as well as objective—which could survey the peculiarities of self in as whimsical a light as those of other people.

This is not all of Mrs. Swancourt. She had held out to Elfride hands whose fingers were literally stiff with rings, *signis auroque rigentes*, like Helen's robe. These rows of rings were not worn in vanity apparently. They were mostly antique and dull, though a few were the reverse.

RIGHT HAND.

1st. Plainly set oval onyx, representing a devil's head. 2d. Green jasper intaglio, with red veins. 3d. Entirely gold, bearing figure of a hideous griffin. 4th. A sea-green monster diamond, with small diamonds round it. 5th. Antique cornelian intaglio of dancing figure of a satyr. 6th. An angular band chased with dragons' heads. 7th. A faceted carbuncle accompanied by ten little twinkling emeralds; &c. &c.

LEFT HAND.

1st. A reddish-yellow toadstone. 2d. A heavy ring enamelled in colours, and bearing a jacinth. 3d. An amethystine sapphire. 4th. A polished ruby, surrounded by diamonds. 5th. The engraved ring of an abbess. 6th. A gloomy intaglio; &c. &c.

Beyond this rather quaint array of stone and metal, Mrs. Swancourt wore no ornament whatever.

Elfride had been favourably impressed with Mrs. Troyton at their meeting about two months earlier; but to be pleased with a woman as a momentary acquaintance was different from being taken with her as a stepmother. However, the suspension of feeling was but for a moment. Elfride decided to like her still.

Mrs. Swancourt was a woman of the world as to knowledge, the reverse as to action, as her marriage suggested. Elfride and the lady were soon inex-

tricably involved in conversation, and Mr. Swancourt left them to themselves.

"And what do you find to do with yourself here?" Mrs. Swancourt said, after a few remarks about the wedding. "You ride, I know."

"Yes, I ride. But not much, because papa doesn't like my going alone."

"You must have an attendant."

"And I read, and write a little."

"You should write a novel. The regular resource of people who don't go enough into the world to live a novel is to write one."

"I have," said Elfride, looking dubiously at Mrs. Swancourt, as if in doubt whether she would meet with ridicule there.

"That's right. Now, then, what is it about, dear?"

"About—well, it is a romance of the Middle Ages."

"Knowing nothing of the present age, which everybody knows about, for safety you chose an age known neither to you nor other people. That's it, eh? No, no; I don't mean it, dear."

"Well, I have had some opportunities of studying mediæval art and manners in the library and private museum at Endelstow House, and I thought I should like to try my hand upon a fiction. I know the time for these tales is past; but I was interested in it, very much interested."

"When is it to appear?"

"Oh, never, I suppose."

"Nonsense, my dear girl. Publish it, by all means. All ladies do that sort of thing now; not for profit, you know, but as a guarantee of mental respectability to their future husbands."

"An excellent idea of us ladies."

"Though I am afraid it rather resembles the melancholy ruse of throwing loaves over castle-walls at besiegers, and suggests desperation rather than plenty inside."

"Did you ever try it?"

"No; I was too far gone even for that."

"Papa says no publisher will take my book."

"That remains to be proved. I'll give my word, my dear, that by this time next year it shall be printed."

"Will you, indeed?" said Elfride, partially brightening with pleasure, though she was sad enough in her depths. "I thought brains were the indispensable, even if the only, qualification for admission to the republic of letters. A mere commonplace creature like me will soon be turned out again."

"Oh no; once you are there you'll be like a drop of water in a piece of rock-crystal—your medium will dignify your commonness."

"It will be a great satisfaction," Elfride murmured, and thought of Stephen, and wished she could make a great fortune by writing romances, and marry him and live happily.

"And then we'll go to London, and then to

Paris," said Mrs. Swancourt. "I have been talking to your father about it. But we have first to move into the manor-house, and we think of staying at Torquay whilst that is going on. Meanwhile, instead of going on a honeymoon scamper by ourselves, we have come home to fetch you, and go all together to Bath for two or three weeks."

Elfride assented pleasantly, even gladly; but she saw that, by this marriage, her father and herself had ceased for ever to be the close relations they had been up to a few weeks ago. It was impossible now to tell him the tale of her wild elopement with Stephen Smith.

He was still snugly housed in her heart. His absence had regained for him much of that aureola of saintship which had been nearly abstracted during her reproachful mood on that miserable journey from London. Rapture is often cooled by contact with its cause, especially if under awkward conditions. And that last experience with Stephen had done anything but make him shine in her eyes. His very kindness in letting her return was his offence. Elfride had her sex's love of sheer force in a man, however ill-directed; and at that critical juncture in London, Stephen's only chance of retaining the ascendancy over her that his face and not his parts had acquired for him, would have been by doing what, for one thing, he was too youthful to undertake—that was, dragging her by the wrist to the rails of some altar, and peremptorily marrying her. Decisive action is seen by appreciative minds to be

frequently objectless, and sometimes fatal; but decision, however suicidal, has more charm for a woman than the most unequivocal Fabian success.

However, some of the unpleasant accessories of that occasion were now out of sight again, and Stephen had resumed not a few of his fancy colours.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS.

IT is London in October—two months further on in the story.

Bede's Inn has this peculiarity, that it faces, receives from, and discharges into a bustling thoroughfare speaking only of wealth and respectability, whilst its postern abuts on as crowded and poverty-stricken a network of alleys as are to be found anywhere in the metropolis. The moral consequences are, first, that those who occupy chambers in the Inn may see a great deal of shirtless humanity's habits and enjoyments without doing more than look down from a back window; and second, they may hear wholesome though unpleasant social reminders through the medium of a harsh voice, an unequal footstep, the echo of a blow or a fall, which originates in the person of some drunkard or wife-beater, as he crosses and interferes with the quiet of the square. Characters of this kind frequently pass through the Inn from a little foxhole of an alley at the back, but they never loiter there.

It is hardly necessary to state that all the sights and movements proper to the Inn are most orderly. On the fine October evening on which we follow Stephen Smith to this place, a placid porter is sit-

ting on a stool under a sycamore-tree in the midst, with a little cane in his hand. We notice the thick coat of soot upon the branches, hanging underneath them in flakes, as in a chimney. The blackness of these boughs does not at present improve the tree—nearly forsaken by its leaves as it is—but in the spring their green fresh beauty is made doubly beautiful by the contrast. Within the railings is a flower-garden of respectable dahlias and chrysanthemums, where a man is sweeping the leaves from the grass.

Stephen selects a doorway, and ascends an old though wide wooden staircase, with moulded balusters and handrail, which in a country manor-house would be considered a noteworthy specimen of Renaissance workmanship. He reaches a door on the first floor, over which is painted, in black letters, "Mr. Henry Knight" — "Barrister-at-law" being understood but not expressed. The wall is thick, and there is a door at its outer and inner face. The outer one happens to be ajar: Stephen goes to the other, and taps.

"Come in!" from distant penetralia.

First was a small anteroom, divided from the inner apartment by a wainscoted archway two or three yards wide. Across this archway hung a pair of dark-green curtains, making a mystery of all within the arch, except the spasmodic scratching of a quill-pen. Here was grouped a chaotic assemblage of articles—mainly old framed prints and paintings—leaning edgewise against the wall, like roofing slates in a builder's yard. All the books visible

here were folios too big to be stolen—some lying on a heavy oak table in one corner, some on the floor among the pictures, the whole intermingled with old coats, hats, umbrellas, and walking-sticks.

Stephen pushed aside the curtain, and before him sat a man writing away as if his life depended upon it—which it did.

A man of thirty in a speckled coat, with dark-brown hair, curly beard, and crisp moustache: the latter running into the beard on each side of the mouth, and, as usual, hiding the real expression of that organ under a chronic aspect of impassivity.

“Ah, my dear fellow, I knew ’twas you,” said Knight, looking up with a smile, and holding out his hand.

Knight’s mouth and eyes came to view now. Both features were good, and had the peculiarity of appearing younger and fresher than the brow and face they belonged to, which were getting sicklied o’er by the unmistakable pale cast. The mouth had not quite relinquished rotundity of curve for the firm angularities of middle life; and the eyes, though keen, permeated rather than penetrated: what they had lost of their boy-time brightness by a dozen years of hard reading lending a quietness to their gaze which suited them well.

A lady would have said there was a smell of tobacco in the room: a man that there was not.

Knight did not rise. He looked at a timepiece on the mantelshelf, then turned again to his letters, pointing to a chair.

"Well, I am glad you have come. I only returned to town yesterday: now, don't speak, Stephen, for ten minutes; I have just that time to the late post. At the eleventh minute, I'm your man."

Stephen sat down as if this kind of reception was by no means new, and away went Knight's pen, beating up and down like a ship in a storm.

Cicero called the library the soul of the house; here the house was all soul. Portions of the floor, and half the wall-space, were taken up by bookshelves ordinary and extraordinary; the remaining parts, together with brackets, side-tables, &c., being occupied by casts, statuettes, medallions, and plaques of various descriptions, picked up by the owner in his wanderings through France and Italy.

One stream only of evening sunlight came into the room from a window quite in the corner, overlooking a court. An aquarium stood in the window. It was a dull parallelopipedon enough for living creatures at most hours of the day; but for a few minutes in the evening, as now, an errant, kindly ray lighted up and warmed the little world therein, when the many-coloured zoophytes opened and put forth their arms, the weeds acquired a rich transparency, the shells gleamed of a more golden yellow, and the timid community expressed gladness more plainly than in words.

Within the prescribed ten minutes, Knight flung down his pen, rang for the boy to take the letters to the post, and at the closing of the door exclaimed, "There; thank God, that's done. Now, Stephen, pull your chair round, and tell me what you have

been doing all this time. Have you kept up your Greek?"

"No."

"How's that?"

"I haven't enough spare time."

"That's nonsense."

"Well, I have done a great many things, if not that. And I have done one extraordinary thing."

Knight turned full upon Stephen. "Ah-ha! Now, then, let me look into your face, put two and two together, and make a shrewd guess."

Stephen changed to a redder colour.

"Why, Smith," said Knight, after holding him rigidly by the shoulders, and keenly scrutinising his countenance for a minute in silence, "you have fallen in love."

"Well—the fact is"—

"Now, out with it." But seeing that Stephen looked rather distressed, he changed to a kindly tone. "Now, Smith, my lad, you know me well enough by this time, or you ought to; and you know very well that if you choose to give me a detailed account of the phenomenon within you, I shall listen; if you don't, I am the last man in the world to care to hear it."

"I'll tell this much: I *have* fallen in love, and I want to be *married*."

Knight looked ominous as this passed Stephen's lips.

"Don't judge me before you have heard more," cried Stephen anxiously, seeing the change in his friend's countenance.

"I don't judge. Does your mother know about it?"

"Nothing definite."

"Father?"

"No. But I'll tell you. The young person"——

"Come, that's dreadfully ungallant. But perhaps I understand the frame of mind a little, so go on. Your sweetheart"——

"She is rather higher in the world than I am."

"As it should be."

"And her father won't hear of it, as I now stand."

"Not an uncommon case."

"And now comes what I want your advice upon. Something has happened at her house which makes it out of the question for us to ask her father again now. So we are keeping silent. In the meantime an architect in India had just written to Mr. Hewby to ask whether he can find for him a young assistant willing to go over to Bombay to prepare drawings for work formerly done by the engineers. The salary he offers is 350 rupees a month, or about £ 35. Hewby has mentioned it to me, and I have been to Dr. Wray, who says I shall acclimatise without much illness. Now, would you go?"

"You mean to say, because it is a possible road to the young lady."

"Yes; I was thinking I could go over and make a little money, and then come back and ask for her. I have the option of practising for myself after a year."

"Would she be staunch?"

"Oh yes! For ever—to the end of her life!"

"How do you know?"

"Why, how do people know? Of course, she will."

Knight leant back in his chair. "Now, though I know her thoroughly as she exists in your heart, Stephen, I don't know her in the flesh. All I want to ask is, is this idea of going to India based entirely upon a belief in her fidelity?"

"Yes; I should not go if it were not for her."

"Well, Stephen, you have put me in rather an awkward position. If I give my true sentiments, I shall hurt your feelings; if I don't, I shall hurt my own judgment. And remember, I don't know much about women."

"But you have had sweethearts, although you tell me very little about them."

"And I only hope you'll continue to prosper till I tell you more."

Stephen winced at this rap. "I have never formed a deep attachment," continued Knight. "I never have found a woman worth it. Nor have I been once engaged to be married."

"You write as if you had been engaged a hundred times, if I may be allowed to say so," said Stephen in an injured tone.

"Yes, that may be. But, my dear Stephen, it is only those who half know a thing that write about it. Those who know it thoroughly don't take the trouble. All I know about women, or men either, is a mass of generalities. I plod along, and occasionally lift my eyes and skim the weltering surface

of mankind lying between me and the horizon, as a crow might; no more."

Knight stopped as if he had fallen into a train of thought, and Stephen looked with affectionate awe at a master whose mind he believed could swallow up at one meal all that his own head contained.

There was affective sympathy, but no great intellectual fellowship, between Knight and Stephen Smith. Knight had seen his young friend when the latter was a cherry-cheeked happy boy, had been interested in him, had kept his eye upon him, and generously helped the lad to books, till the mere connection of patronage grew to acquaintance, and that ripened to friendship. And so, though Smith was not at all the man Knight would have deliberately chosen as a friend—or even for one of a group of a dozen friends—he somehow was his friend. Circumstance, as usual, did it all. How many of us can say of our most intimate *alter ego*, leaving alone friends of the outer circle, that he is the man we should have chosen, as embodying the net result after adding up all the points in human nature that we love, and principles we hold, and subtracting all that we hate? The man is really somebody we got to know by mere physical juxtaposition long maintained, and was taken into our confidence, and even heart, as a makeshift.

"And what do you think of her?" Stephen ventured to say, after a silence.

"Taking her merits on trust from you," said Knight, "as we do those of the Roman poets of

whom we know nothing but that they lived, I still think she will not stick to you through, say, three years of absence in India."

"But she will!" cried Stephen desperately. "She is a girl all delicacy and honour. And no woman of that kind, who has committed herself so into a man's hands as she has into mine, could possibly marry another."

"How has she committed herself?" asked Knight curiously.

Stephen did not answer. Knight had looked on his love so sceptically that it would not do to say all that he had intended to say by any means.

"Well, don't tell," said Knight. "But you are begging the question, which is, I suppose, inevitable in love."

"And I'll tell you another thing," the younger man pleaded. "You remember what you said to me once about women receiving a kiss. Don't you? Why, that instead of our being charmed by the fascination of their bearing at such a time, we should immediately doubt them if their confusion has any *grace* in it—that awkward bungling was the true charm at such a time, implying that we are the first who has played such a part with them."

"It is true, quite," said Knight musingly.

It often happened that the disciple thus remembered the lessons of the master long after the master himself had forgotten them.

"Well, that was like her!" cried Stephen

triumphantly. "She was in such a flurry that she didn't know what she was doing."

"Splendid, splendid!" said Knight soothingly. "So that all I have to say is, that if you see a good opening in Bombay there's no reason why you should not go without troubling to draw fine distinctions as to reasons. No man fully realises what opinions he acts upon, or what his actions mean."

"Yes; I go to Bombay. I'll write a note here, if you don't mind."

"Sleep over it—it is the best plan—and write to-morrow. Meantime, go there to that window and sit down, and look at my Humanity Show. I am going to dine out this evening, and have to dress here out of my portmanteau. I bring up my things like this to save the trouble of going down to my place at Richmond and back again."

Knight then went to the middle of the room and flung open his portmanteau, and Stephen drew near the window. The streak of sunlight had crept upward, edged away, and vanished; the zoophytes slept: a dusky gloom pervaded the room. And now another volume of light shone over the window.

"There!" said Knight, "where is there in England a spectacle to equal that? I sit there and watch them every night before I go home. Softly open the sash."

Beneath them was an alley running up to the wall, and thence turning sideways and passing under an arch, so that Knight's back window was immediately over the angle, and commanded a view of the alley lengthwise. Crowds—mostly of women—

were surging, bustling, and pacing up and down. Gaslights glared from butchers' stalls, illuminating the lumps of flesh to splotches of orange and vermillion, like the wild colouring of Turner's later pictures, whilst the purl and babble of tongues of every pitch and mood was to this human wild-wood what the ripple of a brook is to the natural forest.

Nearly ten minutes passed. Then Knight also came to the window.

"Well, now, I call a cab and vanish down the street in the direction of Berkeley Square," he said, buttoning his waistcoat and kicking his morning suit into a corner. Stephen rose to leave.

"What a heap of literature!" remarked the young man, taking a final longing survey round the room, as if to abide there for ever would be the great pleasure of his life, yet feeling that he had almost outstayed his welcome-while. His eyes rested upon an arm-chair piled full of newspapers, magazines, and bright new volumes in green and red.

"Yes," said Knight, also looking at them and breathing a sigh of weariness; "something must be done with several of them soon, I suppose. Stephen, you needn't hurry away for a few minutes, you know, if you want to stay; I am not quite ready. Overhaul those volumes whilst I put on my coat, and I'll walk a little way with you."

Stephen sat down beside the arm-chair and began to tumble the books about. Among the rest he found a novelette in one volume, *The Court of Kelyon Castle*. By Ernest Field.

"Are you going to review this?" inquired Stephen

with apparent unconcern, and holding up Elfride's effusion.

"Which? Oh, that! I may—though I don't do much light reviewing now. But it is reviewable."

"How do you mean?"

Knight never liked to be asked what he meant. "Mean! I mean that the majority of books published are neither good enough nor bad enough to provoke criticism, and that that book does provoke it."

"By its goodness or its badness?" Stephen said with some anxiety on poor little Elfride's score.

"Its badness. It seems to be written by some girl in her teens."

Stephen said not another word. He did not care to speak plainly of Elfride after that unfortunate slip his tongue had made with regard to her having committed herself; and, apart from that, Knight's severe—almost dogged and self-willed—honesty in criticising was unassailable by the humble wish of a youthful friend like Stephen.

Knight was now ready. Turning off the gas, and slamming together the door, they went downstairs and into the street.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE FROLIC WHILE 'TIS MAY.

It has now to be not only supposed but clearly realised that nearly three-quarters of a year have passed away. In place of the autumnal scenery which formed a setting to the previous enactments, we have the culminating blooms of summer in the year following.

Stephen is in India, slaving away at an office in Bombay; occasionally going up the country on professional errands, and wondering why people who had been there longer than he complained so much of the effect of the climate upon their constitutions. Never had a young man a finer start than seemed now to present itself to Stephen. It was just in that exceptional heyday of prosperity which shone over Bombay some years ago, that he arrived on the scene. Building and engineering partook of the general impetus. Speculation moved with an accelerated velocity every successive day, the only disagreeable contingency connected with it being the possibility of a collapse.

Elfride had never told her father of the four-and-twenty-hours' escapade with Stephen, nor had it, to her knowledge, come to his ears by any other route. It was a secret trouble and grief to the girl

for a short time, and Stephen's departure was another ingredient in her sorrow. But Elfride possessed special facilities for getting rid of trouble after a decent interval. Whilst a slow nature was imbibing a misfortune little by little, she had swallowed the whole agony of it at a draught and was brightening again. She could slough off a sadness and replace it by a hope as easily as a lizard renews a diseased limb.

And two such excellent distractions had presented themselves. One was bringing out the romance and looking for notices in the papers, which, though they had been significantly short so far, had served to divert her thoughts. The other was migrating from the vicarage to the more commodious old house of Mrs. Swancourt's, overlooking the same valley. Mr. Swancourt at first disliked the idea of being transplanted to feminine soil, but the obvious advantages of such an accession of dignity reconciled him to the change. So there was a radical "move;" the two ladies staying at Torquay as had been arranged, the vicar going to and fro.

Mrs. Swancourt considerably enlarged Elfride's ideas in an aristocratic direction, and she began to forgive her father for his politic marriage. Certainly, in a worldly sense, a handsome face at three-and-forty had never served a man in better stead.

The new house at Kensington was ready, and they were all in town.

The Hyde Park shrubs had been transplanted as usual, the chairs ranked in line, the grass edgings

trimmed, the roads made to look as if they were suffering from a heavy thunder-storm; carriages had been called for by the easeful, horses by the brisk, and the Drive and Row were again the groove of gaiety for an hour. We gaze upon the spectacle, at six o'clock on this midsummer afternoon, in a melon-frame atmosphere and beneath a violet sky. The Swancourt equipage formed one in the stream.

Mrs. Swancourt was a talker of talk of the incisive kind, which her low musical voice—the only beautiful point in the old woman—prevented from being wearisome.

“Now,” she said to Elfride, who, like Æneas at Carthage, was full of admiration for the brilliant scene, “you will find that our companionless state will give us, as it does everybody, an extraordinary power in reading the features of our fellow-creatures here. I always am a listener in such places as these—not to the narratives told by my neighbours’ tongues, but by their faces—the advantage of which is, that whether I am in Row, Boulevard, Rialto, or Prado, they all speak the same language. I may have acquired some skill in this practice through having been an ugly lonely woman for so many years, with nobody to give me information; a thing you will not consider strange when the parallel case is borne in mind,—how truly people who have no clocks will tell the time of day.”

“Ay, that they will,” said Mr. Swancourt corroboratively. “I have known labouring men at Endelstow and other farms who had framed complete systems of observation for that purpose. By

means of shadows, winds, clouds, the movements of sheep and oxen, the singing of birds, the crowing of cocks, and a hundred other sights and sounds which people with watches in their pockets never know the existence of, they are able to pronounce within ten minutes of the hour almost at any required instant. That reminds me of an old story which I'm afraid is too bad—too bad to repeat." Here the vicar shook his head and laughed inwardly.

"Tell it—do!" said the ladies.

"I mustn't quite tell it."

"That's absurd," said Mrs. Swancourt.

"It was only about a man who, by the same careful system of observation, was known to deceive persons for more than two years into the belief that he kept a barometer by stealth, so exactly did he foretell all changes in the weather by the braying of his ass and the temper of his wife."

Elfride laughed.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Swancourt. "And in just the way that those learnt the signs of nature, I have learnt the language of her illegitimate sister—artificiality; and the fibbing of eyes, the contempt of nose tips, the indignation of back hair, the laughter of clothes, the cynicism of footsteps, and the various emotions lying in walking-stick twirls, hat-liftings, the elevation of parasols, the carriage of umbrellas, become as A B C to me.

"Just look at that daughter's sister class of mamma in the carriage across there," she continued to Elfride, pointing with merely a turn of her eye. "The absorbing self-consciousness of her position

that is shown by her countenance is most humiliating to a lover of one's country. You would hardly believe, would you, that members of a Fashionable World, whose professed zero is far above the highest degree of the humble, could be so ignorant of the elementary instincts of reticence."

"How?"

"Why, to bear on their faces, as plainly as on a phylactery, the inscription, 'Do, pray, look at the coronet on my panels;' or, 'Look at the leaves and pearls in my coronet;' or, 'Look at the leaves pure and unmixed in mine.' 'I don't say,' they seem to go on saying to the shabby people, 'that I wish you to think us connected with the Norman Conquest of you, wretched Nobody-knows-who,' or whatever the word of the season is for the poorer inhabitants of the country, 'but we are, and there is our crest and significant motto.'"

"O Mrs. Swancourt!" said Elfride.

"But I much prefer the manners of my acquaintance of that class to the way some of us, with no title but much wealth, look at the strugglers for gentility. There's a specimen—there's another. The glance in them is modified to 'Oh, moneyless ones, this bracelet I wear, weighing three-quarters of a pound, is real gold! Solid, you know—s,o,l,i,d,—right through to the middle and out at the other side.'"

"Really, Charlotte," said the vicar, "you see as much in faces as Mr. Puff saw in Lord Burleigh's nod."

Elfride could not but admire the beauty of her

fellow country-women, especially since herself and her own few acquaintances had always been slightly sunburnt or marked on the back of the hands by a bramble-scratch at this time of the year.

"And what lovely flowers and leaves they wear in their bonnets!" she exclaimed.

"Oh yes," returned Mrs. Swancourt. "Some of them are even more striking in colour than any real ones. Look at that beautiful rose worn by the lady inside the rails. Elegant vine-tendrils introduced upon the stem as an improvement upon prickles, and all growing so naturally just over her ear—I say *growing* advisedly, for the pink of the petals and the pink of her handsome cheeks are equally from Nature's hand to the eyes of the most casual observer."

"But praise them a little, they do deserve it!" said generous Elfride.

"Well, I do. See how the Duchess of——waves to and fro in her seat, utilising the sway of her barouche by looking forward only when her head is swung forward, with a passive pride which forbids a resistance to the force of circumstance. Look at the pretty pout on the mouths of that family there, retaining no traces of being arranged beforehand, so well is it done. Look at the demure close of the little fists holding the parasols; the tiny alert thumb, sticking up erect against the ivory stem as knowing as can be, the satin of the parasol invariably matching the complexion of the face beneath it, yet seemingly by an accident, which makes the thing so attractive. There's the red book lying on the opposite

seat, bespeaking the vast numbers of their acquaintance. And I particularly admire the aspect of that abundantly-daughtered woman on the other side—I mean her look of unconsciousness that the girls are stared at by the walkers, and above all the look of the girls themselves—losing their gaze in the depths of handsome men’s eyes without appearing to notice whether they are observing masculine eyes or the leaves of the trees. There’s praise for you. But I am only jesting, child—you know that.”

“Piph-ph-ph—how warm it is, to be sure!” said Mr. Swancourt, as if his mind were a long distance from all he saw. “I declare that my watch is so hot that I can scarcely bear to touch it to see what the time is, and all the world smells like the inside of a hat.”

“How the men stare at you, Elfride!” said the elder lady. “You will kill me quite, I am afraid.”

“Kill you?”

“As a diamond kills an opal in the same setting.”

“I have noticed several ladies and gentlemen looking at me,” said Elfride artlessly, showing her pleasure at being observed.

“My dear, you mustn’t say ‘gentlemen’ nowadays,” her stepmother answered in the tones of arch concern that so well became her. “We have handed over ‘gentlemen’ to the lower middle class, where the word is still to be heard at tradesmen’s balls and provincial tea-parties, I believe. It is done with here.”

“What must I say, then?”

“‘Ladies and *men*’ always.”

At this moment appeared in the stream of vehicles moving in the contrary direction a chariot presenting in its general surface the rich indigo hue of a midnight sky, the wheels and margins being picked out in delicate lines of ultramarine; the servants' liveries were dark-blue coats and silver lace, and breeches of neutral Indian red. The whole concern formed an organic whole, and moved along behind a pair of dark-chestnut geldings, who advanced in an indifferently zealous trot, very daintily performed, and occasionally shrugged divers points of their veiny surface as if they were rather above the business.

In this sat a gentleman with no decided characteristics more than that he somewhat resembled a good-natured commercial traveller of the superior class. Beside him was a lady with skim-milky eyes and complexion, belonging to the interesting class of women, where that class merges in the sickly, her greatest pleasure being apparently to enjoy nothing. Opposite this pair sat two little girls in white hats and blue feathers.

The lady saw Elfride, smiled and bowed, and touched her husband's elbow, who turned and received Elfride's movement of recognition with a gallant elevation of his hat. Then the two children held up their arms to Elfride, and laughed gleefully.

"Who is that?"

"Why, Lord Luxellian, isn't it?" said Mrs. Swancourt, who, with the vicar, had been seated with her back towards them.

"Yes," replied Elfride. "He is the one man of those I have seen here whom I consider handsomer than papa."

"Thank you, dear," said Mr. Swancourt.

"Yes; but your father is so much older. When Lord Luxellian gets a little farther on in life, he won't be half so good-looking as our man."

"Thank you, dear, likewise," said Mr. Swancourt.

"See," exclaimed Elfride, still looking towards them, "how those little dears want me! Actually one of them is crying for me to come."

"We were talking of bracelets just now. Look at Lady Luxellian's," said Mrs. Swancourt, as the baroness lifted up her arm to support one of the children. "It is slipping up her arm—too large by half. I hate to see daylight between a bracelet and a wrist; I wonder women haven't better taste."

"It is not on that account, indeed," Elfride expostulated. "It is that her arm has got thin, poor thing. You cannot think how much she has altered in this last twelvemonth."

The carriages were now nearer together, and there was an exchange of more familiar greetings between the two families. Then the Luxellians crossed over and drew up under the plane-tree, just in the rear of the Swancourts. Lord Luxellian alighted, and came forward with a musical laugh.

It was his attraction, as a man. People liked him for those tones, and forgot that he had no talents. Acquaintances remembered Mr. Swancourt by his manner; they remembered Stephen Smith by his face, Lord Luxellian by his laugh.

Mr. Swancourt made some friendly remarks—among other things upon the heat.

“Yes,” said Lord Luxellian, “we were driving by a furrier’s window this afternoon, and the sight filled us all with such a sense of suffocation that we were glad to get away. Ha-ha!” He turned to Elfride. “Miss Swancourt, I have hardly seen or spoken to you since your literary feat was made public. I had no idea a child was taking notes down at quiet Endelstow, or I should certainly have put myself and friends upon our best behaviour. Swancourt, why didn’t you give me a hint!”

Elfride fluttered, blushed, laughed, said it was nothing to speak of, &c. &c.

“Well, I think you were rather unfairly treated by the *Present*; I certainly do. Writing a heavy review like that upon an elegant trifle like the *Court of Kellyon Castle* was absurd.”

“What?” said Elfride, opening her eyes. “Was I reviewed in the *Present*?”

“Oh yes; didn’t you see it? Why, it was four or five months ago!”

“No, I never saw it. How sorry I am! What a shame of my publishers! They promised to send me every notice that appeared.”

“Ah, then, I am almost afraid I have been giving you disagreeable information, intentionally withheld out of courtesy. Depend upon it they thought no good would come of sending it, and so would not pain you unnecessarily.”

“Oh no; I am indeed glad you have told me, Lord Luxellian. It is quite a mistaken kindness on

their part. Is the review so much against me?" she inquired tremulously.

"No, no; not that exactly—though I almost forget its exact purport now. It was merely—merely sharp, you know—ungenerous, I might say. But really my memory does not enable me to speak decidedly."

"We'll drive to the *Present* office, and get one directly; shall we, papa?"

"If you are so anxious, dear, we will, or send. But to-morrow will do."

"And do oblige me in a little matter now, Miss Swancourt," said Lord Luxellian warmly, and looking as if he were sorry he had brought news that disturbed her. "I am in reality sent here as a special messenger by my little Polly and Katie to ask you to come into our carriage with them for a short time. I am just going to walk across into Piccadilly, and my wife is left alone with them. I am afraid they are rather spoilt children; but I have half promised them you shall come."

The steps were let down, and Elfride was then transferred—to the intense delight of the little girls, and to the great interest of loungers with red skins and long necks, who curiously eyed the performance with their walking-sticks to their lips, occasionally laughing from far down their throats and with their eyes, their mouths not being concerned in the operation at all. Lord Luxellian then told the coachman to drive on, lifted his hat, smiled a smile that missed its mark and alighted on a total stranger,

who bowed in bewilderment. Lord Luxellian looked long at Elfride.

The look was a manly, open, and genuine look of admiration; a momentary tribute of a kind which any honest Englishman might have paid to fairness without being ashamed of the feeling, or permitting it to encroach in the slightest degree upon his emotional obligations as a husband and head of a family. Then Lord Luxellian turned away, and walked musingly to the upper end of the promenade.

Mr. Swancourt had alighted at the same time with Elfride, crossing over to the Row for a few minutes to speak to a friend he recognised there; and his wife was thus left sole tenant of the carriage.

Now, whilst this little act had been in course of performance, there stood among the promenading spectators a man of somewhat different description from the rest. Behind the general throng, in the rear of the chairs, and leaning against the trunk of a tree, he looked at Elfride with quiet and critical interest.

Three points about this unobtrusive person showed promptly to the exercised eye that he was not a Row man *pur sang*. First, an irrepressible wrinkle or two in the waist of his frockcoat—denoting that he had not damned his tailor sufficiently to drive that tradesman up to the orthodox high pressure of cunning workmanship. Second, a slight slovenliness of umbrella, occasioned by its owner's habit of resting heavily upon it, and using it as a

veritable walking-stick, instead of letting its point touch the ground in the most coquettish of kisses, as is the proper Row manner to do. Third, and chief reason, that try how you might, you could scarcely help supposing, on looking at his face, that your eyes were not far from a well-finished mind, instead of the well-finished skin *et præterea nihil*, which is by rights the Mark of the Row.

The probability is that, had not Mrs. Swancourt been left alone in her carriage under the tree, this man would have remained in his unobserved seclusion. But seeing her thus, he came round to the front, stooped under the rail, and stood beside the carriage-door.

Mrs. Swancourt looked reflectively at him for a quarter of a minute, then held out her hand laughingly:

"Why, Henry Knight—of course it is! My—second—third—fourth cousin—what shall I say? At any rate, my kinsman."

"Yes, one of a remnant not yet cut off. I scarcely was certain of you, either, from where I was standing."

"I have not seen you since you first went to Oxford; consider the number of years! You know, I suppose, of my marriage?"

And there sprang up a dialogue concerning family matters of birth, death, and marriage, which it is not necessary to detail. Knight presently inquired:

"The young lady who changed into the other carriage is, then, your stepdaughter?"

"Yes, Elfride. You must know her."

"And who was the lady in the carriage Elfride entered; who had an ill-defined and watery look, as if she were only the reflection of herself in a pool?"

"Lady Luxellian; very weakly, Elfride says. However, Henry, you'll come and see us, of course. 24 Chevron Square. Come this week. We shall only be in town a week or two longer."

"Let me see. I am compelled to leave for Oxford to-morrow, where I shall be for several days; so that I must, I fear, lose the pleasure of seeing you in London this year."

"Then come to Endelstow; why not return with us?"

"I am afraid if I were to come before August I should have to leave again in a day or two. I should be delighted to be with you at the beginning of that month; and I could stay a nice long time. I have thought of going westward all the summer."

"Very well. Now remember that's a compact. And won't you wait now and see Mr. Swancourt? He will not be away ten minutes longer."

"No; I'll beg to be excused; for I must get to my chambers again this evening before I go home; indeed, I ought to have been there now—I have such a press of matters to attend to just at present. You will explain to him, please. Good-bye."

"And let us know the day of your appearance as soon as you can."

"I will."

CHAPTER XV.

A WANDERING VOICE.

THOUGH sheer and intelligible griefs are not charmed away by being confided to mere acquaintances, the process is a palliative to certain ill-humours. Among these, perplexed vexation is one—a species of trouble which, like a stream, gets shallower by the simple operation of widening it in any quarter.

On the evening of the day succeeding that of the meeting in the Park, Elfride and Mrs. Swancourt were engaged in conversation in the dressing-room of the latter. Such a treatment of such a case was in course of adoption here.

Elfride had just before received an affectionate letter from Stephen Smith in Bombay, which had been forwarded to her from Endelstow. But since this is not the case referred to, it is not worth while to pry farther into the contents of the letter than to discover that, with rash though pardonable confidence in coming times, he addressed her in high spirits as his darling future wife.

Probably there cannot be instanced a briefer and surer rule-of-thumb test of a man's temperament—sanguine or cautious—than this: did he or does he ante-date the word wife in corresponding with a sweetheart he honestly loves?

She had taken this epistle into her own room, read a little of it, then *saved* the rest for to-morrow, not wishing to be so extravagant as to consume the pleasure all at once. Nevertheless, she could not resist the wish to enjoy yet a little more, so out came the letter again, and in spite of misgivings as to prodigality the whole was devoured. The letter was finally reperused and placed in her pocket.

What was this? Also a newspaper for Elfride, which she had overlooked in her hurry to open the letter. It was the old number of the *Present*, containing the article upon her book, forwarded as had been requested.

Elfride had hastily read it through, shrunk perceptibly smaller, and had then gone with the paper in her hand to Mrs. Swancourt's dressing-room, to lighten or at least modify her vexation by a discriminating estimate from her stepmother.

She was now looking disconsolately out of the window.

"Never mind, my child," said Mrs. Swancourt after a careful perusal of the matter indicated. "I don't see that the review is such a terrible one, after all. Besides, everybody has forgotten about it by this time. I'm sure the opening is good enough for any book ever written. Just listen—it sounds better read aloud than when you pore over it silently: '*The Court of Kellyon Castle. A Romance of the Middle Ages. By Ernest Field.*' In the belief that we were for a while escaping the monotonous repetition of wearisome details in modern social scenery, analyses of uninteresting character,

or the unnatural unfoldings of a sensation plot, we took this volume into our hands with a feeling of pleasure. We were disposed to beguile ourselves with a fancy that some new change might possibly be rung upon donjon keeps, chain and plate armour, deeply scarred cheeks, tender maidens disguised as pages, to which we had not listened long ago.' Now, that's a very good beginning, in my opinion, and one to be proud of having brought out of a man who has never seen you."

"Ah, yes," murmured Elfride wofully. "But, then, see farther on."

"Well the next bit is rather unkind, I must own," said Mrs. Swancourt, and read on. "'Instead of this we found ourselves in the hands of some young lady, hardly arrived at years of discretion, to judge by the silly device it has been thought worth while to adopt on the title-page, with the idea of disguising her sex.'"

"I am not 'silly'!" said Elfride indignantly. "He might have called me anything but that."

"You are not, indeed. Well:—'Hands of a young lady . . . whose chapters are simply devoted to impossible tournaments, towers, and escapades, which read like flat copies of like scenes in the stories of Mr. G. P. R. James, and the most unreal portions of "Ivanhoe." The bait is so palpably artificial that the most credulous gudgeon turns away.' Now, my dear, I don't see overmuch to complain of in that. It proves that you were clever enough to make him think of Sir Walter Scott, which is a great deal."

"Oh yes; though I cannot romance myself, I am able to remind him of those who can." Elfride intended to hurl these words sarcastically at her invisible enemy, but as she had no more satirical power than a wood-pigeon, they merely fell in a pretty murmur from lips shaped to a pout.

"Certainly: and that's something. Your book is good enough to be bad in an ordinary literary manner, and doesn't stand by itself in a melancholy position altogether worse than assailable.—'That interest in an historical romance may nowadays have any chance of being sustained, it is indispensable that the reader find himself under the guidance of some nearly extinct species of legendary, who, in addition to an impulse towards antiquarian research and an unweakened faith in the mediæval halo, shall possess an inventive faculty in which delicacy of sentiment is far overtopped by a power of welding to stirring incident a spirited variety of the elementary human passions.' Well, that long-winded effusion doesn't refer to you at all, Elfride, merely something put in to fill up. Let me see, when does he come to you again; . . . not till the very end, actually. Here you are finally polished off:

"But to return to the little work we have used as the text of this article. We are far from altogether disparaging the author's powers. She has a certain versatility that enables her to use with effect a style of narration peculiar to herself, which may be called a murmuring of delicate emotional trifles, the particular gift of those to whom the social sympathies of a peaceful time are as daily food.

Hence, where matters of domestic experience, and the natural touches which make people real, can be introduced without anachronisms too striking, she is occasionally felicitous; and upon the whole we feel justified in saying that the book will bear looking into for the sake of those portions which have nothing whatever to do with the story.'

"Well, I suppose it is intended for satire; but don't think anything more of it now, my dear. It is seven o'clock." And Mrs. Swancourt rang for her maid.

Attack is more piquant than concord. Stephen's letter was concerning nothing but oneness with her: the review was the very reverse. And a stranger with neither name nor shape, age nor appearance, but a mighty voice, is naturally rather an interesting novelty to a lady he chooses to address. When Elfride fell asleep that night she was loving the writer of the letter, but thinking of the writer of that article.

CHAPTER XVI.

THEN FANCY SHAPES—AS FANCY CAN.

ON a day about three weeks later, the Swancourt trio were sitting quietly in the drawing-room of The Crag, Mrs. Swancourt's house at Endelstow, chatting, and taking easeful survey of their previous month or two of town—a tangible weariness even to people whose acquaintances there might be counted on the fingers.

A mere season in London with her practised stepmother had so advanced Elfride's perceptions, that her courtship by Stephen seemed emotionally meagre, and to have drifted back several years into a childish past. In regarding our mental experiences, as in visual observation, our own progress reads like a dwindling of that we progress from.

She was seated on a low chair, looking over her romance with melancholy interest for the first time since she had become acquainted with the remarks of the *Present* thereupon.

"Still thinking of that reviewer, Elfie?"

"Not of him personally: but I am thinking of his opinion. Really, on looking into the volume after this long time has elapsed, he seems to have estimated one part of it fairly enough."

"No, no; I wouldn't show the white feather now!

Fancy that of all people in the world the writer herself should go over to the enemy. How shall Monmouth's men fight when Monmouth runs away?"

"I don't do that. But I think he is right in some of his arguments, though wrong in others. And because he has some claim to my respect I regret all the more that he should think so mistakenly of my motives in one or two instances. It is more vexing to be misunderstood than to be misrepresented; and he misunderstands me. I cannot be easy whilst a person goes to rest night after night attributing to me intentions I never had."

"He doesn't know your name, or anything about you. And he has doubtless forgotten there is such a book in existence by this time."

"I myself should certainly like him to be put right upon one or two matters," said the vicar, who had hitherto been silent. "You see, critics go on writing, and are never corrected or argued with, and therefore are never improved."

"Papa," said Elfride brightening, "write to him!"

"I would as soon write to him as look at him, for the matter of that," said Mr. Swancourt.

"Do! And say, the young person who wrote the book did not adopt a masculine sobriquet in vanity or conceit, but because she was afraid it would be thought presumptuous to publish her name, and that she did not mean the story for such as he, but as a sweetener of history for young people, who might thereby acquire a taste for what went on in their own country hundreds of years ago, and be tempted to dive deeper into the subject. Oh, there

is so much to explain; I wish I might write myself!"

"Now, Elfie, I'll tell you what we will do," answered Mr. Swancourt, tickled with a sort of bucolic humour at the idea of criticising the critic. "You shall write a clear account of what he is wrong in, and I will copy it and send it as mine."

"Yes, now, directly!" said Elfride jumping up. "When will you send it, papa?"

"Oh, in a day or two, I suppose," he returned. Then the vicar paused and slightly yawned, and in the manner of elderly people, began to relax from his ardour for the undertaking now that it came to the point. "But, really, it is hardly worth while," he said.

"O papa!" said Elfride with much disappointment. "You said you would, and now you won't. That is not fair!"

"But how can we send it if we don't know whom to send it to?"

"If you really want to send such a thing, it can easily be done," said Mrs. Swancourt, coming to her stepdaughter's rescue. "An envelope addressed, 'To the Critic of *The Court of Kellyon Castle*, care of the Editor of the *Present*,' would find him."

"Yes, I suppose it would."

"Why not write your answer yourself, Elfride?" Mrs. Swancourt inquired.

"I might," she said hesitatingly; "and send it anonymously: that would be treating him as he has treated me."

"No use in the world!"

"But I don't like to let him know my exact name. Suppose I put my initials only? The less you are known the more you are thought of."

"Yes; you might do that."

Elfride set to work there and then. Her one desire for the last fortnight seemed likely to be realised. As happens with sensitive and secluded minds, a continual dwelling upon the subject had magnified to colossal proportions the space she assumed herself to occupy or to have occupied in the occult critic's mind. At noon and at night she had been pestering herself with endeavours to perceive more distinctly his conception of her as a woman, apart from an authoress: whether he really despised her; whether he thought more or less of her than of ordinary young women who never ventured into the fire of criticism at all. Now she would have the satisfaction of feeling that at any rate he knew her true intent in crossing his path, annoying him so by her performance, and be taught perhaps to despise it a little less.

Four days later an envelope, directed to Miss Swancourt in a strange hand, made its appearance from the post-bag.

"Oh," said Elfride, her heart sinking within her. "Can it be from that man—a lecture for impertinence? And actually one for Mrs. Swancourt in the same handwriting!" She feared to open hers. "Yet how can he know my name? No; it is somebody else."

"Nonsense!" said her father grimly. "You sent your initials, and the Directory was available.

Though he wouldn't have taken the trouble to look there unless he had been thoroughly savage with you. I thought you wrote with rather more asperity than simple literary discussion required." This timely clause was introduced to save the character of the vicar's judgment under any issue of affairs.

"Well, here I go," said Elfride, desperately tearing open the seal.

"To be sure, of course," exclaimed Mrs. Swancourt; and looking up from her letter, "Christopher, I quite forgot to tell you, when I mentioned that I had seen my distant relative, Harry Knight, that I invited him here for whatever length of time he could spare. And now he says he can come any day in August."

"Write, and say the first of the month," replied the indiscriminate vicar.

She read on. "Goodness me—and that isn't all. He is actually the reviewer of Elfride's book. How absurd, to be sure! I had no idea he reviewed novels or had anything to do with the *Present*. He is a barrister—and I thought he only wrote in the *Quarterlies*. Why, Elfride, you have brought about an odd entanglement! What does he say to you?"

Elfride had put down her letter with a dissatisfied flush on her face. "I don't know. The idea of his knowing my name and all about me!... Why, he says nothing particular, only this—

"‘MY DEAR MADAM,—Though I am sorry that my remarks should have seemed harsh to you, it is a pleasure to find that they have been the means of

bringing forth such an ingeniously-argued reply. Unfortunately, it is so long since I wrote my review, that my memory does not serve me sufficiently to say a single word in my defence, even supposing there remains one to be said, which is doubtful. You will find from a letter I have written to Mrs. Swancourt, that we are not such strangers to each other as we have been imagining. Possibly, I may have the pleasure of seeing you soon, when any argument you choose to advance shall receive all the attention it deserves."

"That is dim sarcasm—I know it is."

"Oh no, Elfride."

"And then, his remarks didn't seem harsh—I mean I did not say so."

"He thinks you are in a frightful temper," said Mr. Swancourt, chuckling in undertones.

"And he will come and see me, and find the authoress as contemptible in speech as she has been impertinent in manner. I do heartily wish I had never written a word to him!"

"Never mind," said Mrs. Swancourt, also laughing in low quiet jerks; "it will make the meeting such a comical affair, and afford splendid by-play for your father and myself. The idea of our running our heads against Harry Knight all the time! I cannot get over that."

The vicar had immediately recognised the name, as that of Stephen Smith's preceptor and friend; but having ceased to concern himself in the matter, he made no remark to that effect, consistently for-

bearing to allude to anything which could restore recollection of the (to him) disagreeable mistake with regard to poor Stephen's lineage and position. Elfride had of course perceived the same thing, which added to the complication of relationship a mesh that her stepmother knew nothing of.

The identification scarcely heightened Knight's attractions now, though a twelvemonth ago she would only have cared to see him for the interest he possessed as Stephen's friend. Fortunately for Knight's advent, such a reason for welcome had only begun to be awkward to her at a time when the interest he had acquired on his own account made it no longer necessary.

These coincidences, in common with all relating to him, tended to keep Elfride's mind upon the stretch concerning Knight. As was her custom when upon the horns of a dilemma, she walked off by herself among the laurel bushes, and there, standing still and splitting up a leaf without removing it from its stalk, fetched back recollections of Stephen's frequent words in praise of his friend, and wished she had listened more attentively. Then, still pulling the leaf, she would blush at some fancied mortification that would accrue to her from his words when they met, in consequence of her intrusiveness, as she now considered it, in writing to him.

The next development of her meditations was the subject of what this man's personal appearance might be—was he tall or short, dark or fair, gay or grim? She would have asked Mrs. Swancourt, but

for the risk she might thereby incur of some teasing remark being returned. Ultimately, Elfride would say, "Oh, what a plague that reviewer is to me!" and turn her face to where she imagined India lay, and murmur to herself, "Ah, my little husband, what are you doing now? Let me see, where are you—south, east, where? Behind that hill, ever so far behind!"

CHAPTER XVII.

HER WELCOME, SPOKE IN FALTERING PHRASE.

"THERE is Henry Knight, I declare!" said Mrs. Swancourt one day.

They were gazing from the jutting angle of a wild enclosure not far from the Crag, which almost overhung the valley already described as leading up from the sea and little port of Stranton. The stony escarpment upon which they stood had the contour of a man's face, and it was covered with furze as with a beard. People in the field above were preserved from an accidental roll down these prominences and hollows by a hedge on the very crest, which was doing that kindly service for Elfride and her mother now.

Scrambling higher into the hedge and stretching her neck further over the furze, Elfride beheld the individual signified. He was walking leisurely along the little green path at the bottom, beside the stream, a satchel slung upon his left hip, a stout walking-stick in his hand, and a brown-holland sun-hat upon his head. The satchel was worn and old, and the outer polished surface of the leather was cracked and peeling off.

Knight having arrived over the hills to Stranton upon the top of a crazy omnibus, preferred to walk

the remaining two miles up the valley, leaving his luggage to be brought on.

Behind him a boy wandered helter-skelter, and by that natural law of physics by which lesser bodies gravitate towards the greater, this boy drew near Knight, and trotted like a little dog close at his heels, whistling as he went, with his eyes fixed upon Knight's boots as they rose and fell.

When they had reached a point precisely opposite that in which Mrs. and Miss Swancourt lay in ambush, Knight stopped and turned round.

"Look here, my boy," he said.

The boy parted his lips, opened his eyes, and answered nothing.

"Here's sixpence for you, on condition that you don't again come within twenty yards of my heels, all the way up the valley."

The boy, who apparently had not known he had been looking at Knight's heels at all, took the sixpence mechanically, and Knight went on again, wrapt in meditation.

"A nice voice," Elfride thought; "but what a singular temper!"

"Now we must get indoors before he ascends the slope," said Mrs. Swancourt softly. And they went across by a short cut over a stile, entering the lawn by a side door, and so on to the house.

Mr. Swancourt had gone into the village with the curate, and Elfride felt too nervous to await their visitor's arrival in the drawing-room with Mrs. Swancourt. So that when the elder lady entered, Elfride made some pretence of perceiving a new

variety of crimson geranium, and lingered behind among the flower beds.

There was nothing gained by this, after all, she thought; and a few minutes after boldly came into the house by the glass side-door. She walked along the corridor, and entered the drawing-room. Nobody was there.

A window at the angle of the room opened directly into an octagonal conservatory, enclosing the corner of the building. From the conservatory came voices in conversation—Mrs. Swancourt's and the stranger's.

She had expected him to talk brilliantly. To her surprise he was asking questions in quite a learner's manner, on subjects connected with the flowers and shrubs that she had known for years. When after the lapse of a few minutes he spoke at some length, she considered there was a hard square decisiveness in the shape of his sentences, as if, unlike her own and Stephen's, they were not there and then newly constructed, but were drawn forth from a large store ready-made. They were now approaching the window to come in again.

"That is a flesh-coloured variety," said Mrs. Swancourt. "But oleanders, though they are such bulky shrubs, are so very easily wounded as to be unprunable—giants with the sensitiveness of young ladies. Oh, here is Elfride!"

Elfride looked as guilty and crestfallen as Lady Teazle at the dropping of the screen. Mrs. Swancourt presented him half comically, and Knight in

a minute or two placed himself beside the young lady.

A complexity of instincts checked Elfride's conventional smiles of complaisance and hospitality; and to make her still less comfortable, Mrs. Swancourt immediately afterwards left them together to seek her husband. Mr. Knight, however, did not seem at all incommoded by his feelings, and he said with light easefulness,

"So, Miss Swancourt, I have met you at last. You escaped me by a few minutes only when we were in London."

"Yes. I found that you had seen Mrs. Swancourt."

"And now reviewer and reviewed are face to face," he added unconcernedly.

"Yes: though the fact of your being a relative takes off the edge of it. It was strange that you should be one of Mrs. Swancourt's family all the time." Elfride began to recover herself now, and to look into Knight's face. "I was merely anxious to let you know my real meaning in writing the book—extremely anxious."

"I can quite understand the wish; and I was gratified that my remarks should have reached home. They very seldom do, I am afraid."

Elfride drew herself in. Here he was, sticking to his opinions as firmly as if friendship and politeness did not in the least require an immediate renunciation of them.

"You made me very uneasy and sorry by writing such things," she murmured, suddenly dropping

the mere *caqueterie* of a fashionable first introduction, and speaking with some of the dudgeon of a child towards a severe schoolmaster.

"That is rather the object of honest critics in such a case. Not to cause unnecessary sorrow: 'To make you sorry after a proper manner, that ye may receive damage by us in nothing,' as a powerful pen once wrote to the Gentiles. Are you going to write another romance?"

"Write another!" she said. "That somebody may pen a condemnation and 'nail't wi' Scripture' again, as you do now, Mr. Knight?"

"You may do better next time," he said placidly: "I think you will. But I would advise you to confine yourself to domestic scenes."

"Thank you. But never again."

"Well, you may be right. That a young lady has taken to writing is not by any means the best thing to hear about her."

"What is the best?"

"I prefer not to say."

"Do you know? Then, do tell me, please."

"To hear that she has married."

Elfride hesitated. "And what when she has been married?" she said at last partly in order to withdraw her own person from the argument.

"Then to hear no more about her. It is as Smeaton said of his lighthouse: her greatest real praise, when the novelty of her inauguration has worn off, is that nothing happens to keep the talk of her alive."

"Yes, I see," said Elfride softly and thought-

fully. "But of course it is different quite with men. Why don't you write novels, Mr. Knight?"

"Because I couldn't write one that would interest anybody."

"Why?"

"For several reasons. It requires a talented omission of your real thoughts to make a novel popular, for one thing."

"Is that really necessary? Well, I am sure you could learn to do that with practice," said Elfride with an *ex-cathedrâ* air, as became a person who spoke from experience in the art. "You would make a great name for certain," she continued.

"So many people make a name nowadays, that it is more distinguished to remain in obscurity."

"Tell me seriously—apart from the subject—why don't you write a volume instead of loose articles?" she insisted.

"Since you are pleased to make me talk of myself, I will tell you seriously," said Knight, not less amused at this catechism by his young friend than he was interested in her appearance. "As I have implied, I have not the wish. And if I had the wish, I could not now concentrate sufficiently. We all have only our one cruse of energy given us to make the best of. And where that energy has been leaked away week by week, quarter by quarter, as mine has for the last nine or ten years, there is not enough dammed back behind the mill at any given period to supply the quantum a complete book on any subject requires. Then there is the self-confidence and waiting power. Where quick results

have grown customary, they are fatal to a lively faith in the future."

"Yes, I comprehend; and so you choose to write in fragments?"

"No, I don't choose to do it in the sense you mean; choosing from a whole world of professions, all possible. It was by the constraint of accident merely. Not that I object to the accident."

"Why don't you object—I mean, why do you feel so quiet about things?" Elfride was half afraid to question him so, but her intense curiosity to see what the inside of literary Mr. Knight was like, kept her going on.

Knight certainly did not mind being frank with her. Instances of this trait in men who have warm feelings, but are reticent from habit, may be recalled by all of us. When they find a listener who can by no possibility make use of them, rival them, or condemn them, reserved and even suspicious men of the world become frank, keenly enjoying the inner side of their frankness.

"Why I don't mind the accidental constraint," he replied, "is because, in making beginnings, a chance limitation of direction is often better than absolute freedom."

"I see—that is, I should if I quite understood what all those generalities mean."

"Why, this: That an arbitrary foundation for one's work, which no length of thought can alter, leaves the attention free to fix itself on the work itself, and make the best of it."

"Lateral compression forcing altitude, as would

be said in that tongue," she said mischievously. "And I suppose where no limit exists, as in the case of a rich man with a wide taste who wants to do something, it will be better to choose a limit capriciously than to have none."

"Yes," he said meditatively. "I can go as far as that."

"Well," resumed Elfride, "I think it better for a man's nature if he does nothing in particular."

"There is such a case as being obliged to."

"Yes, yes; I was speaking of when you are not obliged to for any other reason than delight in the prospect of fame. I have thought many times lately that a thin widespread happiness, commencing now, and of a piece with the days of your life, is preferable to an anticipated heap far away in the future, and none now."

"Why, that's the very thing I said just now as being the principle of all ephemeral doers like myself."

"Oh, I am sorry to have parodied you," she said with some confusion. "Yes, of course. That is what you meant about not trying to be famous." And she added, with the quickness of conviction characteristic of her mind: "There is much littleness in trying to be great. A man must think a good deal of himself, and be conceited enough to believe in himself, before he tries at all."

"But it is soon enough to say there is harm in a man's thinking a good deal of himself when it is proved he has been thinking wrong, and too soon then sometimes. Besides, we should not conclude

that a man who strives earnestly for success does so with a strong sense of his own merit. He may see how little success has to do with merit, and his motive may be his very humility."

This manner of treating her rather provoked Elfride. No sooner did she agree with him than he ceased to seem to wish it, and took the other side. "Ah," she thought inwardly, "I shall have nothing to do with a man of this kind, though he is our visitor."

"I think you will find," resumed Knight, pursuing the conversation more for the sake of finishing off his thoughts on the subject than for engaging her attention, "that in actual life it is merely a matter of instinct with men—this trying to push on. They awake to a recognition that they have, without premeditation, begun to try a little, and they say to themselves, 'Since I have tried thus much, I will try a little more.' They go on because they have begun."

Elfride, in her turn, was not particularly attending to his words at this moment. She had, unconsciously to herself, a way of seizing any point in the remarks of an interlocutor which interested her, and dwelling upon it, and thinking thoughts of her own thereupon, totally oblivious of all that he might say in continuation. On such occasions she artlessly surveyed the person speaking; and then there was a time for a painter. Her eyes seemed to look at you, and past you, as you were then, into your future; and past your future into your eternity—not

reading it, but gazing in an unused, unconscious way—her mind still clinging to its original thought.

This is how she was looking at Knight.

Suddenly Elfride became conscious of what she was doing, and was painfully confused.

“What were you so intent upon in me?” he inquired.

“As far as I was thinking of you at all, I was thinking how clever you are,” she said with a want of premeditation that was startling in honesty and simplicity.

Feeling restless now that she had so unwittingly spoken, she arose and stepped to the window, having heard the voices of her father and Mrs. Swancourt coming up below the terrace. “Here they are,” she said, going out. Knight walked out upon the lawn behind her. She stood upon the edge of the terrace, close to the stone balustrade, and looked towards the sun, hanging over a glade, just now fair as Tempe’s vale, up which her father was walking.

Knight could not help looking at her. The sun was within ten degrees of the horizon, and its warm light flooded her face and heightened the bright rose colour of her cheeks to a vermilion red, their moderate pink hue being only seen in its natural tone where the cheek curved round into shadow. The ends of her hanging hair softly dragged themselves backwards and forwards upon her shoulder as each faint breeze thrust against or relinquished it. Fringes and ribbons of her dress, moved by the same breeze, licked like tongues upon the parts

around them, and fluttering forward from shady folds caught likewise their share of the lustrous orange glow.

Mr. Swancourt shouted out a welcome to Knight from a distance of about thirty yards, and after a few preliminary words proceeded to a conversation of deep earnestness on Knight's fine old family name, and theories as to lineage and intermarriage connected therewith. Knight's portmanteau having in the meantime arrived, they soon retired to prepare for dinner, which had been postponed two hours later than the usual time of that meal.

An arrival was an event in the life of Elfride, now that they were again in the country, and that of Knight necessarily an engrossing one. And that evening she went to bed for the first time without thinking of Stephen at all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HE HEARD HER MUSICAL PANTS.

THE old tower of West Endelstow Church had reached the last weeks of its existence. It was to be replaced by a new one from the designs of Mr. Hewby, the architect who had sent down Stephen. Planks and poles had arrived in the churchyard, iron bars had been thrust into the venerable crack extending down the belfry wall to the foundation, the bells had been taken down, the owls had forsaken this home of their forefathers, and six iconoclasts in white fustian, to whom a cracked edifice was a species of Mumbo Jumbo, had taken lodgings in the village previous to commencing the actual removal of the stones.

This was the day after Knight's arrival. To enjoy for the last time the prospect seaward from the summit, the vicar, Mrs. Swancourt, Knight, and Elfride, all ascended the winding turret—Mr. Swancourt stepping forward with many loud pants, his wife struggling along silently, but suffering none the less. They had hardly reached the top when a large lurid cloud, palpably a reservoir of rain, thunder, and lightning, was seen to be advancing overhead from the north.

The two cautious elders suggested an immediate return, and proceeded to put it in practice as regarded themselves.

"Dear me, I wish I had not come up," exclaimed Mrs. Swancourt.

"We shall be slower than you two in going down," the vicar said over his shoulder, "and so, don't you start till we are nearly at the bottom, or you will run over us and break our necks somewhere in the darkness of the turret."

Accordingly Elfride and Knight waited on the leads till the staircase should be clear. Knight was not in a talkative mood that morning. Elfride was rather wilful, by reason of his inattention, which she privately set down to his thinking her not worth talking to. Whilst Knight stood watching the rise of the cloud, she sauntered to the other side of the tower, and there remembered a giddy feat she had performed the year before. It was to walk round upon the parapet of the tower—which was quite without battlement or pinnacle, and presented a smooth flat surface about two feet wide, forming a pathway on all the four sides. Without reflecting in the least upon what she was doing, she now stepped upon the parapet in the old way, and began walking along.

"We are down, cousin Henry," cried Mrs. Swancourt up the turret. "Follow us when you like."

Knight turned and saw Elfride beginning her elevated promenade. His face flushed with mingled concern and anger at her rashness.

"I certainly gave you credit for more common sense," he said.

She reddened a little and walked on.

"Miss Swancourt, I insist upon your coming down," he exclaimed.

"I will in a minute. I am safe enough. I have done it often."

At that moment, by reason of a slight perturbation his words had caused in her, Elfride's foot caught itself in a little tuft of grass growing in a joint of the stonework, and she almost lost her balance. Knight sprang forward with a face of horror. By what seemed the special interposition of a considerate Providence she tottered to the inner edge of the parapet instead of to the outer, and reeled over upon the lead roof two or three feet below the wall.

Knight seized her as in a vice, and he said, panting, "That ever I should have met a woman fool enough to do a thing of that kind! Good God, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

The close proximity of the Shadow of Death had made her sick and pale as a corpse before he spoke. Already lowered to that state, his words completely overpowered her, and she swooned away as he held her.

Elfride's eyes were not closed for more than forty seconds. She opened them, and remembered the position instantly. His face had altered its expression from stern anger to pity. But his severe remarks had rather frightened her, and she struggled to be free.

"If you can stand, of course you may," he said, and loosened his arms. "I hardly know whether most to laugh at your freak or to chide for its folly."

She immediately sank upon the lead-work. Knight lifted her again. "Are you hurt?" he said.

She murmured an incoherent expression, and tried to smile; saying, with a fitful aversion of her face, "I am only frightened. Put me down, do put me down!"

"But you can't walk," said Knight.

"You don't know that; how can you? I am only frightened, I tell you," she answered petulantly, and raised her hand to her forehead. Knight then saw that she was bleeding from a severe cut in her wrist, apparently where it had descended upon a salient corner of the leadwork. Elfride, too, seemed to perceive and feel this now for the first time, and for a minute nearly lost consciousness again. Knight rapidly bound his handkerchief round the place, and to add to the complication, the thundercloud he had been watching began to shed some heavy drops of rain. Knight looked up and saw the vicar striding towards the house, and Mrs. Swancourt waddling beside him like a hard-driven duck.

"As you are so faint, it will be much better to let me carry you down," said Knight; "or at any rate inside out of the rain." But her objection to be lifted made it impossible for him to support her for more than five steps.

"This is folly, great folly," he exclaimed, setting her down.

"Indeed!" she murmured with tears in her eyes. "I say I will not be carried, and you say this is folly."

"So it is."

"No, it isn't."

"It is folly, I think. At any rate, the origin of it all is."

"I don't agree to it. And you needn't get so angry with me; I am not worth it."

"Indeed, you are. You are worth the enmity of princes, as was said of such another. Now, then, will you clasp your hands behind my neck, that I may carry you down without hurting you?"

"No, no."

"You had better, or I shall foreclose."

"What's that!"

"Deprive you of your chance."

Elfride gave a little toss.

"Now, don't writhe so when I attempt to carry you."

"I can't help it."

"Then submit quietly."

"I don't care, I don't care," she murmured in languid tones and with closed eyes.

He took her into his arms, entered the turret, and with slow and cautious steps descended round and round. Then, with the gentleness of a nursing mother, he attended to the cut on her arm. During his progress through the operations of wiping it and binding it up anew, her face changed its aspect from pained indifference to something like bashful interest, interspersed with small tremors and shudders of a trifling kind.

In the centre of each pale cheek a small red spot the size of a wafer had now made its appearance, and continued to grow larger. Elfride mo-

mentarily expected a recurrence to the lecture on her foolishness, but Knight said no more than this,

"Promise me *never* to walk on that parapet again."

"It will be pulled down soon: so I do." In a few minutes she continued in a lower tone, and seriously, "You are familiar of course, as everybody is, with those strange sensations we sometimes have, that our life for the moment exists in duplicate."

"That we have lived through that moment before?"

"Or shall again. Well, I felt on the tower that something similar to that scene is again to be common to us both."

"God forbid!" said Knight. "Promise me that you will never again walk on any such place on any consideration."

"I do."

"That such a thing has not been before, we know. That it shall not be again, you vow. Therefore think no more of such a foolish fancy."

There had fallen a great deal of rain, but unaccompanied by lightning. A few minutes longer, and the storm had ceased.

"Now, take my arm, please."

"Oh no, it is not necessary." This relapse into wilfulness was because he had again connected the epithet foolish with her.

"Nonsense: it is quite necessary; it will rain again directly, and you are not half recovered." And without more ado, Knight took her hand, drew it under his arm, and held it there so firmly that

she could not have removed it without a struggle. Feeling like a colt in a halter for the first time, at thus being led along, yet afraid to be angry, it was to her great relief that she saw the carriage coming round the corner to fetch them.

Her fall upon the roof was necessarily explained to some extent upon their entering the house; but both forbore to mention a word of what she had been doing to cause such an accident. During the remainder of the afternoon Elfride was invisible; but at dinner-time she appeared as bright as ever.

In the drawing-room, after having been exclusively engaged with Mr. and Mrs. Swancourt through the intervening hour, Knight again found himself thrown with Elfride. She had been looking over a chess problem in one of the illustrated periodicals.

"You like chess, Miss Swancourt?"

"Yes. It is my favourite scientific game; indeed, excludes every other. Do you play?"

"I have played; though not lately."

"Challenge him, Elfride," said the vicar heartily.

"She plays very well for a lady, Mr. Knight."

"Shall we play?" asked Elfride tentatively.

"Oh, certainly. I shall be delighted."

The game began. Mr. Swancourt had forgotten a similar performance with Stephen Smith the year before. Elfride had not; but she had begun to take for her maxim the undoubted truth that the necessity of continuing faithful to Stephen, without suspicion, dictated a fickle behaviour almost as imperatively as fickleness itself; a fact, however,

which would give a startling advantage to the latter quality, should it ever appear.

Knight, by one of those inexcusable oversights which will sometimes afflict the best of players, placed his rook in the arms of one of her pawns. It was her first advantage. She looked triumphant—even ruthless.

“By George! what was I thinking of?” said Knight quietly; and then dismissed all concern at his accident.

“Club laws we’ll have, won’t we, Mr. Knight?” said Elfride suavisely.

“Oh yes, certainly,” said Mr. Knight, a thought, however, just occurring to his mind, that he had two or three times allowed her to replace a man on her religiously assuring him that such a move was an absolute blunder.

She immediately took up the unfortunate rook and the contest proceeded, Elfride having now rather the better of the game. Then he won the exchange, regained his position, and began to press her hard. Elfride grew flurried, and placed her queen on his remaining rook’s file.

“There—how stupid! Upon my word, I did not see your rook. Of course nobody but a fool would have put a queen there knowingly.”

She spoke excitedly, half expecting her antagonist to give her back the move.

“Nobody, of course,” said Knight serenely, and stretched out his hand towards his royal victim.

“It is not very pleasant to have it taken advantage of, then,” she said with some vexation.

"Club laws, I think you said?" returned Knight blandly, and mercilessly appropriating the queen.

She was on the brink of pouting, but was ashamed to show it; tears almost stood in her eyes. She had been trying so hard—so very hard—thinking and thinking till her brain was in a whirl; and it seemed so heartless of him to treat her so, after all.

"I think it is"—she began.

"What?"

—"Unkind to take advantage of a pure mistake I make in that way."

"I lost my rook by even a purer mistake," said the enemy in an inexorable tone, without lifting his eyes.

"Yes, but"—However, as his logic was absolutely unanswerable, she merely registered a protest. "I cannot endure those cold-blooded ways of clubs and professional players, like Staunton and Morphy. Just as if it really mattered whether you have raised your fingers from a man or no."

Knight smiled as pitilessly as before, and they went on in silence.

"Checkmate," said Knight.

"Another game," said Elfride peremptorily, and looking very warm.

"With all my heart," said Knight.

"Checkmate," said Knight again at the end of forty minutes.

"Another game," she returned resolutely.

"I'll give you the odds of a bishop," Knight said to her kindly.

"No, thank you," Elfride replied in a tone in-

tended for courteous indifference; but as a fact, very cavalier indeed.

"Checkmate," said her opponent without the least emotion.

Oh, the difference between Elfride's condition of mind now, and when she purposely made blunders that Stephen Smith might win!

It was bedtime. Her mind as distracted as if it would throb itself out of her head, she went off to her chamber, full of mortification at being beaten time after time when she herself was the aggressor. Having for two or three years enjoyed the reputation throughout the globe of her father's brain—which almost constituted her entire world—of being an excellent player, this fiasco was intolerable; for unfortunately the person most dogged in the belief in a false reputation is always that one, the possessor, who has the best means of knowing that it is not true.

In bed no sleep came to soothe her; that gentle thing being the very middle-of-summer friend in this respect of flying away at the merest troublous cloud. After lying awake till two o'clock, an idea seemed to strike her. She softly arose, got a light, and fetched a Chess Praxis from the library. Returning and sitting up in bed, she diligently studied the volume till the clock struck five, and her eyelids felt thick and heavy. She then extinguished the light and lay down again.

"You look pale, Elfride," said Mrs. Swancourt the next morning at breakfast. "Isn't she, cousin Harry?"

A young lady who is scarcely ill at all can hardly

help becoming so when regarded as such by all eyes turning upon her at the table in obedience to some remark. Everybody looked at Elfride. She certainly was pale.

"Am I pale?" she said with a faint smile. "I did not sleep much. I could not get rid of armies of bishops and knights, try how I would."

"Chess is a bad thing just before bedtime; especially for excitable people like yourself, dear. Don't ever play late again."

"I'll play early instead. Cousin Knight," she said in imitation of Mrs. Swancourt, "will you oblige me in something?"

"Even to half my kingdom."

"Well, it is to play one game more."

"When?"

"Now, instantly; the moment we have breakfasted."

"Nonsense, Elfride," said her father. "Making yourself a slave to the game like that."

"But I want to, papa. Honestly, I am restless at having been so ignominiously overcome. And Mr. Knight doesn't mind. So what harm can there be?"

"Let us play, by all means, if you wish it," said Knight.

So when breakfast was over, the combatants withdrew to the quiet of the library, and the door was closed. Elfride seemed to have an idea that her conduct was rather ill-regulated and startlingly free from conventional restraint. And worse, she fancied upon Knight's face a slightly amused look at her proceedings.

"You think me foolish, I suppose," she said recklessly; "but I want to do my very best just once, and see whether I can overcome you."

"Certainly: nothing more natural. Though I am afraid it is not the plan adopted by women of the world after a defeat."

"Why, pray?"

"Because they know that as good as overcoming is skill in effacing recollection of being overcome, and turn their attention to that entirely."

"I am wrong again, of course."

"Perhaps your wrong is more pleasing than their right."

"I don't quite know whether you mean that, or whether you are laughing at me," she said looking doubtfully at him, yet inclining to accept the more flattering interpretation. "I am almost sure you think it vanity in me to think I am a match for you. Well, if you do, I say that vanity is no crime in such a case."

"Well, perhaps not. Though it is hardly a virtue."

"Oh yes, in battle. Nelson's bravery lay in his vanity."

"Indeed! Then so did his death."

"Oh no, no! For it is written in the book of the prophet Shakespeare,

'Fear and be slain? no worse can come to fight;
And fight and die, is death destroying death!'

And down they sat, and the contest began, Elfride having the first move. The game progressed. Elfride's heart beat so violently that she could not

sit still. Her dread was lest he should hear it. And he did discover it at last—some flowers upon the table being set throbbing by its pulsations.

"I think we had better give over," said Knight, looking at her gently. "It is too much for you, I know. Let us write down the position, and finish another time."

"No, please not," she implored. "I should not rest if I did not know the result at once. It is your move."

Ten minutes passed.

She started up suddenly. "I know what you are doing!" she cried; an angry colour upon her cheeks, and her eyes indignant. "You were thinking of letting me win to please me!"

"I don't mind owning that I was," Knight responded phlegmatically, and appearing all the more so by contrast with her own turmoil.

"But you must not! I won't have it."

"Very well."

"No, that will not do; I insist that you promise not to do any such absurd thing. It is insulting me!"

"Very well, madam. I won't do any such absurd thing. You shall not win."

"That is to be proved," she returned proudly; and the play went on.

Nothing is now heard but the ticking of a quaint old time-piece on the summit of a bookcase. Ten minutes pass; he captures her knight; she takes his knight, and looks a very Rhadamanthus.

More minutes tick away; she takes his pawn

and has the advantage, showing her sense of it rather prominently.

Five minutes more: he takes her bishop: she brings things even by taking his knight.

Three minutes: she looks bold, and takes his queen: he looks placid, and takes hers.

Eight or ten minutes pass: he takes a pawn: she utters a little pooh! but not the ghost of a pawn can she take in retaliation.

Ten minutes pass: he takes another pawn and says, "Check!" She flushes, extricates herself by capturing his bishop, and looks triumphant. He immediately takes her bishop: she looks surprised.

Five minutes longer: she makes a dash and takes his only remaining bishop; he replies by taking her only remaining knight.

Two minutes: he gives check; her mind is now in a painful state of tension, and she shades her face with her hand.

Yet a few minutes more: he takes her rook and checks again. She literally trembles now lest an artful surprise she has in store for him shall be anticipated by the artful surprise he evidently has in store for her.

Five minutes: "Checkmate in two moves!" exclaims Elfride.

"If you can," says Knight.

"Oh, I have miscalculated; that is cruel!"

"Checkmate," says Knight; and the victory is won.

Elfride arose and turned away without letting him see her face. Once in the hall she ran upstairs

and into her room, and flung herself down upon her bed, weeping bitterly.

"Where is Elfride?" said her father at luncheon. Knight listened anxiously for the answer. He had been hoping to see her again before this time.

"She isn't well, sir," was the reply.

Mrs. Swancourt rose and left the room, going upstairs to Elfride's apartment.

"At the door was Unity, who occupied in the new establishment a position between young lady's maid and middle-housemaid.

"She is sound asleep, ma'am," Unity whispered.

Mrs. Swancourt opened the door. Elfride was lying full-dressed on the bed, her face hot and red, her arms thrown abroad. At intervals of a minute she tossed restlessly from side to side, and indistinctly moaned words used in the game of chess.

Mrs. Swancourt had a turn for doctoring, and felt her pulse. It was twanging like a harp-string, at the rate of nearly two hundred a minute. Softly moving the sleeping girl to a little less cramped position, she went downstairs again.

"She is asleep now," said Mrs. Swancourt. "She does not seem very well. Cousin Knight, what were you thinking of? her tender brain won't bear cudgeling like your great head. You should have strictly forbidden her to play again."

In truth, the essayist's experience of the nature of young women was far less extensive than his abstract knowledge of them led himself and others to

believe. He could pack them into sentences like a workman, but practically was nowhere.

"I am indeed sorry," said Knight, feeling even more than he expressed. "But surely, the young lady knows best what is good for her!"

"Bless you, that's just what she doesn't know. She never thinks of such things, does she, Christopher? Her father and I have to command her and keep her in order, as you would a child. She will say things worthy of a French epigrammatist, and act like a robin in a greenhouse. But I think we will send for Dr. Granson—there can be no harm."

A man was straightway dispatched on horseback to Stranton, and the gentleman known as Dr. Granson came in the course of the afternoon. He pronounced her nervous system to be in a decided state of disorder; forwarded some soothing draught, and gave orders that on no account whatever was she to play chess again.

The next morning Knight, much vexed with himself, waited with a curiously compounded feeling for her entry to breakfast. The women servants came in to prayers at irregular intervals, and as each entered, he could not, to save his life, avoid turning his head with the hope that she might be Elfride. Mr. Swancourt began reading without waiting for her. Then somebody glided in noiselessly; Knight softly glanced up: it was only the little kitchen-maid. Knight thought reading prayers a bore.

He went out alone, and for almost the first time

failed to recognise that holding converse with Nature's charms was not solitude. On nearing the house again he perceived his young friend crossing a slope by a path which ran into the one he was following in the angle of the field. Here they met. Elfride was at once exultant and abashed: coming into his presence had upon her the effect of entering a cathedral.

Knight had his note-book in his hand, and had, in fact, been in the very act of writing therein, when they came in view of each other. He left off in the midst of a sentence, and proceeded to inquire warmly concerning her state of health. She said she was perfectly well, and indeed had never looked better. Her health was as inconsequent as her actions. Her lips were red, *without* the polish that cherries have, and their redness margined with the white skin in a clearly-defined line, which had nothing of jagged confusion in it. Altogether she stood as the last person in the world to be knocked over by a game of chess, because too ephemeral-looking to play one.

"Are you taking notes?" she inquired with an alacrity plainly arising less from interest in the subject than from a wish to divert his thoughts from her body.

"Yes; I was making an entry. And with your permission I will complete it." Knight then stood still and wrote. Elfride remained beside him a moment, and afterwards walked on.

"I should like to see all the secrets that are in that book," she gaily flung back to him over her shoulder.

"I don't think you would find much to interest you."

"I know I should."

"Then of course I have no more to say."

"But I would ask this question first. Is it a book of mere facts concerning journeys and expenditure, and so on, or a book of thoughts?"

"Well, to tell the truth, it is not exactly either. It consists for the most part of jottings for articles and essays, disjointed and disconnected, of no possible interest to anybody but myself."

"It contains, I suppose, your developed thoughts in embryo?"

"Yes."

"If they are interesting when enlarged to the size of an article, what must they be in their concentrated form? Pure rectified spirit, above proof; before it is lowered to be fit for human consumption: 'words that burn' indeed."

"Rather like a balloon before it is inflated: flabby, shapeless, dead. You could hardly read them."

"May I try?" she said coaxingly. "I wrote my poor romance in that way—I mean in bits, out of doors—and I should like to see whether your way of entering things is the same as mine."

"Really; that's rather an awkward request. I suppose I can hardly refuse now you have asked so directly; but——"

"You think me ill-mannered in asking. But does not this justify me—your writing in my presence, Mr. Knight? If I had lighted upon your book by chance, it would have been different; but you stand

before me, and say, 'Excuse me,' without caring whether I do or not, and write on, and then tell me they are not private facts but public ideas."

"Very well, Miss Swancourt. If you really must see, the consequences be upon your own head. Remember, my advice to you is to leave my book alone."

"But with that caution I have your permission?"

"Yes."

She hesitated a moment, looked at his hand containing the book, then laughed, and saying, "I must see it," withdrew it from his fingers.

Knight rambled on towards the house, leaving her standing in the path turning over the leaves. By the time he had reached the wicket-gate he saw that she had moved and waited till she came up.

Elfride had closed the note-book, and was carrying it disdainfully by the corner between her finger and thumb; her face wore a nettled look. She silently extended the volume towards him, raising her eyes no higher than her hand was lifted.

"Take it," said Elfride quickly. "I don't want to read it."

"Could you understand it?" said Knight.

"As far as I looked. But I didn't care to read much."

"Why, Miss Swancourt?"

"Only because I didn't wish to—that's all."

"I warned you that you might not."

"Yes, but I never supposed you would have put *me* there."

"Your name is not mentioned once within the four corners."

"Not my name—I know that."

"Nor your description, nor anything by which anybody would recognise you."

"Except myself. For what is this?" she exclaimed, taking it from him and opening a page. "August 7. That's the day before yesterday. But I won't read it," Elfride said, closing the book again with pretty hauteur. "Why should I? I had no business to ask to see your book, and it serves me right."

Knight hardly recollected what he had written, and turned over the book to see. He came to this:

"Aug. 7. Girl gets into her teens, and her self-consciousness is born. After a certain interval passed in infantine helplessness, it begins to act. Simple, young, and inexperienced at first. Persons of observation can tell to a nicety how old this consciousness is by the skill it has acquired in the art necessary to its success—the art of hiding itself. Generally begins career by actions which are popularly termed showing-off. Method adopted depends in each case upon the disposition, rank, residence, of the young lady attempting it. Town-bred girl will utter some moral paradox on fast men, or love. Country miss adopts the more material media of taking a ghastly fence, whistling, or making your blood run cold by appearing to risk her neck. (*Mem. On Endelstow Tower.*)

"An innocent vanity is of course the origin of these displays. 'Look at me,' say these youthful beginners in womanly artifice, without reflecting whether or not it be to their advantage to show so

very much of themselves. (Amplify and correct for paper on Artless Arts.)”

“Yes, I remember now,” said Knight. “The notes were certainly suggested by your manœuvre on the church tower. But you must not think too much of such random observations,” he continued encouragingly, as he noticed her injured looks. “A mere fancy passing through my head assumes a factitious importance to you, because it has been made permanent by being written down. All mankind think thoughts as bad as those of people they most love on earth, but such thoughts never getting embodied on paper, it becomes assumed that they never existed. I daresay that you yourself have thought some disagreeable thing or other of me, which would seem just as bad as this if written. I challenge you, now, to tell me.”

“The worst thing I have thought of you?”

“Yes.”

“I must not.”

“Oh yes.”

“I thought you were rather round-shouldered.”

Knight looked slightly redder.

“And that there was a little bald spot on the top of your head.”

“Heh-heh! Two ineradicable defects,” said Knight, there being a faint ghastliness discernible in his laugh. “They are much worse in a lady’s eye than being thought self-conscious, I suppose.”

“Ah, that’s very fine,” she said, too inexperienced to perceive her hit, and hence not quite disposed to forgive his notes. “You alluded to me in that

entry as if I were such a child, too. Everybody does that. I cannot understand it. I am quite a woman, you know. How old do you think I am?"

"How old? Why, seventeen, I should say. All girls are seventeen."

"You are wrong. I am nearly nineteen. Which class of women do you like best, those who seem younger, or those who seem older than they are?"

"Off-hand I should be inclined to say those who seem older."

So it was not Elfride's class.

"But it is well known," she said eagerly, and there was something touching in the artless anxiety to be thought much of she revealed by her words, "that the slower a nature is to develop, the richer the nature. Youths and girls who are men and women before they come of age are nobodies by the time that backward people have shown their full compass."

"Yes," said Knight thoughtfully. "There is really something in that remark. But at the risk of offence I must remind you that you there take it for granted that the woman behind her time at a given age has not reached the end of her tether. Her backwardness may be not because she is slow to develop, but because she soon exhausted her capacity for developing."

Elfride looked disappointed. By this time they were indoors. Mrs. Swancourt, to whom match-making by any honest means was meat and drink, had now a little scheme of that nature concerning this pair. The morning room, in which they both

expected to find her, was empty; the old lady having, for the above reason, vacated it by the second door as they entered by the first.

Knight went to the chimney-piece, and carelessly surveyed two portraits on ivory.

"Though these pink ladies had very rudimentary features, judging by what I see here," he observed, "they had unquestionably beautiful heads of hair."

"Yes; and that is everything," said Elfride, possibly conscious of her own, possibly not.

"Not everything; though a great deal, certainly."

"Which colour do you like best?" she ventured to ask.

"More depends on its abundance than on its colour."

"Abundances being equal, may I inquire your favourite colour?"

"Dark."

"I mean for women," she said with the minutest fall of countenance, and a hope that she had been misunderstood.

"So do I," Knight replied.

It was impossible for any man not to know the colour of Elfride's hair. In women who wear it plainly such a feature may be overlooked by men not given to ocular intentness. But hers was always in the way. You saw her hair as far as you could see her sex, and knew that it was the palest brown. She knew instantly that Knight, being perfectly aware of this, had an independent standard of admiration in the matter.

Elfride was thoroughly vexed. She could not

but be struck with the honesty of his opinions, and the worst of it was, that the more they went against her, the more she respected them. And now, like a reckless gambler, she hazarded her last and best treasure. Her eyes: they were her all now.

"What coloured eyes do you like best, Mr. Knight?" she said slowly.

"Honestly, or as a compliment?"

"Of course honestly; I don't want anybody's compliment."

And yet Elfride knew otherwise: that a compliment or word of approval from that man then would have been like a well to a famished Arab.

"I prefer hazel," he said serenely.

She had played and lost again.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE WAS IN THE NEXT DEGREE.

KNIGHT had none of those light familiarities of speech which, by judicious touches of epigrammatic flattery, obliterate a woman's recollection of the speaker's abstract opinions. So no more was said by either on the subject of hair, eyes, or development. Elfride's mind had been impregnated with sentiments of her own smallness to an uncomfortable degree of distinctness, and her discomfort was visible in her face. The whole tendency of the conversation latterly had been to quietly but surely disparage her; and she was fain to take Stephen into favour

in self-defence. He would not have been so unloving, she said, as to admire an idiosyncrasy and features different from her own. True, Stephen had declared he loved her: Mr. Knight had never done anything of the sort. Somehow this did not mend matters, and the sensation of her smallness in Knight's eyes still remained. Had the position been reversed—had Stephen loved her in spite of a differing taste, and had Knight been indifferent in spite of her resemblance to his ideal, it would have engendered far happier thoughts. As matters stood, Stephen's admiration might have its root in a blindness the result of passion. Perhaps any keen man's judgment was condemnatory of her.

During the remainder of Saturday they were more or less thrown with their seniors, and no conversation arose which was exclusively their own. When Elfride was in bed that night her thoughts recurred to the same subject. At one moment she insisted that it was ill-natured of him to speak so decisively as he had done; the next, that it was sterling honesty.

"Ah, what a poor nobody I am!" she said sighing. "People like him, who go about the great world, don't care in the least what I am like either in mood or feature."

Perhaps a man who has got thoroughly into a woman's mind in this manner, is half way to her heart; for the distance between her reason and her feeling is proverbially short.

"And are you really going away this week?"

said Mrs. Swancourt to Knight on the following evening, which was Sunday.

They were all leisurely climbing the hill to the church, where a last service was now to be held at the rather exceptional time of evening instead of in the afternoon, previous to the demolition of the ruinous portions.

"I am intending to cross to Cork from Bristol," returned Knight; "and then I go on to Dublin."

"Return this way, and stay a little longer with us," said the vicar. "A week is nothing. We have hardly been able to realise your presence yet. I remember a story which——"

The vicar suddenly stopped. He had forgotten it was Sunday, and would probably have gone on in his weekday mode of thought had not a turn in the breeze blown the skirt of his college gown within the range of his vision, and so reminded him. He at once diverted the current of his narrative with the dexterity the occasion demanded.

"The story of the Levite who journeyed to Bethlehem-judah, from which I took my text the Sunday before last, is quite to the point," he continued, with the pronunciation of a man who, far from having intended to tell a weekday story a moment earlier, had thought of nothing but Sabbath matters for several weeks. "What did he gain after all by his restlessness? Had he remained in the city of the Jebusites, and not been so anxious for Gibeah, none of his troubles would have arisen."

"But he had wasted five days already," said Knight, closing his eyes to the vicar's commendable

diversion. "His fault lay in beginning the tarrying system originally."

"True, true; my illustration fails."

"But not the hospitality which prompted the story."

"So you are to come just the same," urged Mrs. Swancourt, for she had seen an almost imperceptible fall of countenance in her stepdaughter at Knight's announcement.

Knight half promised to call on his return journey; but the uncertainty with which he spoke was quite enough to fill Elfride with a regretful interest in all he did during the few remaining hours. The curate having already officiated twice that day in the two churches, Mr. Swancourt had undertaken the whole of the evening service, and Knight read the lessons for him. The sun streamed across from the dilapidated west window, and lighted all the assembled worshippers with a golden glow, Knight as he read being illuminated by the same mellow lustre. Elfride regarded him with a throbbing sadness of mood which was fed by a sense of being far removed from his sphere. As he went deliberately through the chapter appointed—a portion of the history of Elijah—and ascended that magnificent climax of the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and the still small voice, his deep tones echoed past with such apparent disregard of her existence, that his presence inspired her with a forlorn sense of unapproachableness, which his absence would hardly have been able to cause.

At the same time, turning her face for a mo-

ment to catch the glory of the dying sun as it fell on his face, her eyes were arrested by the shape and aspect of a woman in the west gallery. It was the bleak barren countenance of the widow Jethway, whom Elfride had not seen much of since the morning of her return with Stephen Smith. Possessing the smallest of competencies, this unhappy woman appeared to spend her life in journeyings between Endelstow Churchyard and that of a village near Southampton, where her father and mother were laid.

She had not attended the service here for a considerable time, and she now seemed to have a reason for her choice of seat. From the gallery window the tomb of her son was plainly visible—standing as the nearest object in a prospect which was closed outwardly by the changeless horizon of the sea.

The streaming rays, too, flooded her face, now bent towards Elfride with a hard and bitter expression that the solemnity of the place raised to a tragic dignity it did not intrinsically possess. The girl resumed her normal attitude with an added disquiet.

Elfride's emotion was cumulative, and after a while would assert itself on a sudden. A slight touch was enough to set it free—a poem, a sunset, a cunningly contrived chord of music, a vague imagining, being the usual accidents of its exhibition. The longing for Knight's respect, which was leading up to an incipient yearning for his love, made the present conjuncture a sufficient one. Whilst kneel-

ing down previous to leaving, when the sunny streaks had gone upward to the roof, and the lower part of the church was in soft shadow, she could not help thinking of Coleridge's morbid poem "The Three Graves," and shuddering as she wondered if Mrs. Jethway were cursing her, she wept as if her heart would break.

They came out of church just as the sun went down, leaving the landscape like a platform from which an eloquent speaker has retired, and nothing remains for the audience to do but to rise and go home. Mr. and Mrs. Swancourt went off in the carriage, Knight and Elfride preferring to walk, as the skilful old matchmaker had imagined. They descended the hill together.

"I liked your reading, Mr. Knight," Elfride presently found herself saying. "You read better than papa."

"I will praise anybody that will praise me. You played excellently, Miss Swancourt, and very correctly."

"Correctly—yes."

"It must be a great pleasure to you to take an active part in the service."

"I want to be able to play with more feeling. But I have not a good selection of music, sacred or secular. I wish I had a nice little music-library—well chosen, and that the only new pieces sent me were those of genuine merit."

"I am glad to hear such a wish from you. It is extraordinary how many women have no honest love of music as an end and not as a means, even

leaving out those who have nothing in them. They mostly like it for its accessories. I have never met a woman who loves music as do ten or a dozen men I know."

"How would you draw the line between women with something and women with nothing in them?"

"Well," said Knight, reflecting a moment, "I mean by nothing in them those who don't care about anything solid. This is an instance: I knew a man who had a young friend in whom he was much interested; in fact, they were going to be married. She was seemingly poetical, and he offered her a choice of two editions of the British poets, which she pretended to want badly. He said, 'Which of them would you like best for me to send?' She said, 'A pair of the prettiest ear-rings in Bond Street, if you don't mind, would be nicer than either.' Now I call her a girl with not much in her but vanity; and so do you, I daresay."

"Oh yes," replied Elfride with an effort.

Happening to catch a glimpse of her face as she was speaking, and noticing that her attempt at heartiness was a miserable failure, he appeared to have misgivings.

"You, Miss Swancourt, would not, under such circumstances, have preferred the nicknacks?"

"No, I don't think I should, indeed," she stammered.

"I'll put it to you," said the inflexible Knight. "Which will you have of these two things of about equal value—the well-chosen little library of the best music you spoke of—bound in morocco, walnut

case, lock and key—or a pair of the very prettiest ear-rings in Bond Street windows?”

“Of course the music,” Elfride replied with forced earnestness.

“You are quite certain?” he said emphatically.

“Quite,” she faltered; “if I could for certain buy the ear-rings afterwards.”

Knight, somewhat blamably, keenly enjoyed sparring with the palpitating flexuous creature, whose excitable nature made any such thing a species of cruelty.

He looked at her rather oddly, and said, “Fie!”

“Forgive me,” she said, laughing a little, a little frightened, and blushing very deeply.

“Ah, Miss Elfie, why didn’t you say at first, as any firm woman would have said, I am as bad as she, and shall choose the same?”

“I don’t know,” said Elfride wofully, and with a distressful smile.

“I thought you were exceptionally musical?”

“So I am, I think. But the test is so severe—quite painful.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Music doesn’t do any real good, or rather——”

“That *is* a thing to say, Miss Swancourt! Why, what——”

“You don’t understand! you don’t understand!”

“Why, what conceivable use is there in jimcrack jewellery?”

“No, no, no, no!” she cried petulantly; “I didn’t mean what you think. I like the music best, only I like——”

"Ear-rings better—own it!" he said in a teasing tone. "Well, I think I should have had the moral courage to own it at once, without pretending to an elevation I could not reach."

Like the French soldiery, Elfride was not brave when on the defensive. So it was almost with tears in her eyes that she answered desperately:

"My meaning is, that I like ear-rings best just now, because I lost one of my prettiest pair last year, and papa said he would not buy any more, or allow me to myself, because I was careless; and now I wish I had some like them—that's what my meaning is—indeed it is, Mr. Knight."

"I am afraid I have been very harsh and rude," said Knight, with a look of regret at seeing how disturbed she was. "But seriously, if women only knew how they ruin their good looks by such ap-purtenances, I am sure they would never want them."

"They were lovely, and became me so!"

"Not if they were like the ordinary hideous things women stuff their ears with nowadays—like the governor of a steam-engine, or a pair of scales, or gold gibbets and chains, and artists' palettes, and compensation pendulums, and Heaven knows what besides."

"No; they were not one of those things. So pretty—like this," she said with eager animation. And she drew with the point of her parasol an enlarged view of one of the lamented darlings, to a scale that would have suited a giantess half-a-mile high.

"Yes, very pretty—very," said Knight dryly. "How did you come to lose such a precious pair of articles?"

"I only lost one—nobody ever loses both at the same time."

She made this remark with embarrassment, and a nervous movement of the fingers. Seeing that the loss occurred whilst Stephen Smith was attempting to kiss her for the first time on the cliff, her confusion was hardly to be wondered at. The question had been awkward, and received no direct answer.

Knight seemed not to notice her manner.

"Oh, nobody ever loses both—I see. And certainly the fact that it was a case of loss takes away all odour of vanity from your choice."

"As I never know whether you are in earnest, I don't now," she said, looking up inquiringly at the hairy face of the oracle. And coming gallantly to her own rescue, "If I really seem vain, it is that I am only vain in my ways—not in my heart. The worst women are those vain in their hearts, and not in their ways."

"An adroit distinction. Well, they are certainly the more objectionable of the two," said Knight.

"Is vanity a mortal or a venial sin? You know what life is: tell me."

"I am very far from knowing what life is. A just conception of life is too large a thing to grasp during the short interval of passing through it."

"Will the fact of a woman being fond of jewellery be likely to make her life, in its higher sense, a failure?"

"Nobody's life is altogether a failure."

"Well, you know what I mean, even though my words are badly selected and commonplace," she said impatiently. "Because I utter commonplace words, you must not suppose I think only commonplace thoughts. My poor stock of words are like a limited number of rough moulds I have to cast all my materials in, good and bad; and the novelty or delicacy of the substance is often lost in the coarse triteness of the form."

"Very well; I'll believe that ingenious representation. As to the subject in hand—lives which are failures—you need not trouble yourself. Anybody's life may be just as romantic and strange and interesting if he or she fails as if he or she succeed. All the difference is, that the last chapter is wanting in the story. If a man of power tries to do a great deed, and just falls short of it by an accident not his fault, up to that time his history had as much in it as that of a great man who has done his great deed. It is whimsical of the world to hold that particulars of how a lad went to school and so on should be as an interesting romance or as nothing to them, precisely in proportion to his after renown."

They were walking between the sunset and the moonrise. With the dropping of the sun a nearly full moon had begun to raise itself. Their shadows, as cast by the western glare, showed signs of becoming obliterated in the interest of a rival pair in the opposite direction which the moon was bringing to distinctness.

"I consider my life to some extent a failure," said Knight again after a pause, during which he had noticed the antagonistic shadows.

"You! How?"

"I don't precisely know. But in some way I have missed the mark."

"Really? To have done it is not much to be sad about, but to feel that you have done it must be a cause of sorrow. Am I right?"

"Partly, though not quite. For a sensation of being profoundly experienced serves as a sort of consolation to people who are conscious of having taken wrong turnings. Contradictory as it seems, there is nothing truer than that people who have always gone right don't know half as much about the nature and ways of going right as those who have gone wrong. However, it is not desirable for me to chill your summer-time by going into this."

"You have not told me even now if I am really vain."

"If I say Yes, I shall offend you; if I say No, you'll think I don't mean it," he replied, looking curiously into her face.

"Ah, well," she replied with a little breath of distress, "'That which is exceeding deep, who shall find it out?' I suppose I must take you as I do the Bible—find out and understand all I can; and on the strength of that, swallow the rest in a lump, by simple faith. Think me vain, if you will. Worldly greatness requires so much littleness to grow up in, that an infirmity more or less is not a matter for regret."

"As regards women, I can't say," answered Knight carelessly; "but it is without doubt a misfortune for a man who has a living to get, to be born of a truly noble nature. A high soul will bring a man to the workhouse; so you may be right in sticking up for vanity."

"No, no, I don't do that," she said regretfully. "Mr. Knight, when you are gone, will you send me something you have written? I think I should like to see whether you write as you have lately spoken, or in your better mood. Which is your true self—the cynic you have been this evening, or the nice philosopher you were up to to-night?"

"Ah, which? You know as well as I."

Their conversation detained them on the lawn and in the portico till the stars blinked out. Elfride flung back her head, and said idly,

"There's a bright star exactly over me."

"Each bright star is overhead somewhere."

"Is it? Oh yes, of course. Where is that one?" and she pointed with her finger.

"That is poised like a white hawk over one of the Cape Verde Islands."

"And that?"

"Looking down upon the source of the Nile."

"And that lonely quiet-looking one?"

"He watches the North Pole, and has no less than the whole equator for his horizon. And that idle one low down upon the ground, that we have almost rolled away from, is in India—over the head of a young friend of mine, who very possibly looks at the star in our zenith, as it hangs low upon his

horizon, and thinks of it as marking where his true love dwells."

Elfride glanced at Knight with misgiving. Did he mean her? She could not see his features; but his attitude seemed to show unconsciousness.

"The star is over *my* head," she said with hesitation.

"Or anybody else's in England."

"Oh yes, I see," with a breath of relief.

"His parents, I believe, are natives of this country. I don't know them, though I have been in correspondence with him for many years till lately. Fortunately or unfortunately for him he fell in love, and then went to Bombay. Since that time I have heard very little of him."

Knight went no farther in his volunteered statement, and though Elfride at one moment was inclined to profit by the lessons in honesty he had just been giving her, the flesh was weak, and the intention dispersed into silence. There seemed a reproach in Knight's blind words, and yet she was not able to clearly define any disloyalty that she had been guilty of.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

Hardy, Thomas

A pair of blue eyes a novel

Bd.: 1

1884

P.o.angl. 149 t-13/14

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11664339-6